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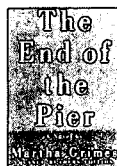
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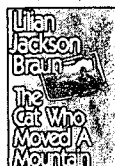
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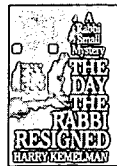
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**T**wo authors (at least) in this issue have a special interest in 1940's movies: Anne Peverell, author of "Blind Panic," and Stanley J. Solomon, author of "They Know Where I Live."

Ms. Peverell, a Briton, made her first appearance in AHMM in January, with "Pritt the Twit," but we had no opportunity to introduce her there, as this column was replaced by our annual Christmas greeting. To make amends . . . she lives in Kent, also has a special interest in dance, worked at the London Contemporary Dance Trust and traveled to Russia in Brezhnev's day to see the ballet there, is the author of some two dozen short stories and two teenage novels, has two grown children (her son is a policeman

with the Metropolitan Police in London) and two granddaughters, and lives "with (head) teacher husband and two elderly longhaired dachshundson the banks of the River Medway in a crumbling 20s bungalow with a tyrannical garden."

Stanley J. Solomon, an English professor, specializes in American 1940's movies, and says that P.I. Raymond Lowery in his story is also an ardent fan of movies of that period. Solomon is the author of three books on film published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, as well as several plays and short stories. "They Know Where I Live" is his first mystery story.

Another first mystery story in this issue is "Incident at

*(continued on page 140)*

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# The Orange Sofa

by Esther J. Holt



I stood on the grassy bank of the river where the cove was deepest cut into the land. Spring had come and gone, leaving the usual collection of people's lives bobbing along, a result of spring floods upstream.

At that time of year people around the county knew just where to be to catch these items passing by like on a big belt. There wasn't a house along the river that didn't have a piece, or several



pieces, of flood furniture. Dressers full of soggy clothing, tables, chairs of all kinds. Not upholstered so much. If a piece hadn't sunk before it got to us, it was nonetheless hardly usable. Overstuffed never quite dried out.

One woman had found a big chest full of the most elegant dishes and silverware, probably some other woman's treasures. Come to check on why such a heavy thing floated so high out of the water, they discovered the chest had a hollow bottom. No doubt for secret things they'd stolen from someone else. It was empty. Someone offered a reward, but I guess it wasn't big enough.

The house that got as far as the cove without breaking up was gone over by people who'd risk life and limb for every little bit of free goods. If they could, the men would snag the house with ropes and use tractors to haul it to shore. Then they went over it like termites until there was nothing left. My own fireplace mantels came from such a house.

I also had a few pieces of flood furniture snagged over the years by my husband Josh before he went off and left me. He took great pride in the dressers, bedstead, and assorted chairs that never quite lost the river smell. No one but outlanders noticed the smell. Didn't every house along the river have it? When he left me, I put all those pieces in one room and locked the door. Maybe I'm still something of an outlander.

Josh is a big machinery operator. He did work for the Crabtree Excavating Company, traveling all over the surrounding counties. I'd rather stay home inside my own walls making quilts and selling them for ungodly sums. My quilts are so famous I even "sign" them by embroidering my first initial and last name, L. Holcomb, in a corner. Someday they'll be in museums. To me, yard goods is an artist's medium.

Josh wanted to leave because Mr. Crabtree had offered him a bossing job at the other end of the state. We'd have to move. I said not me and we had a big argument. In the end Josh and his precious blue pickup were gone, leaving me with my rattly gray sedan. Someone came out to drive the flatbed truck with his backhoe back to the equipment yard. Josh kept it at home now and then to clean it up. He said the guys in the yard didn't really care enough.

Our house stands on a quiet knoll above the river. Every morning it was fit, and sometimes when it wasn't, I took a rest by going down the stony path to watch the river running by. It was my own kind of coffee break.

The morning I saw the thing the sky was gray with backed up rain. The air was wet and sticky. But then a breeze blew across the land, sending the smell of early flowers to push at the river smell. It was a weird morning. My only companion, Mitch the gray tiger, had gone to ground somewhere in the house, and I couldn't find him. Normally, he'd have been walking with me.

The river was always grayish-blue, grayish-green, or just plain gray. That day it matched the sky, moving along at a sedate old lady pace and, I noticed, getting lower all the time.

That's why when I saw it I couldn't believe my eyes. At that time of year the cove was narrowing and not running so swiftly. Anything that swung into the cove from the river should have drifted to the bank and hung itself up. Eventually it would be pulled back by the lapping water. Mostly, though, it was claimed by someone. Once the big floods were over, no one actually made a point of waiting. Pickings were slim.

The color alone would have stopped me in my tracks—if I'd been walking instead of just standing there. As bright an orange as I'd ever seen, and I've looked at about a million miles of yard goods in my time. At first I couldn't be sure of what the thing was. Like the side of an open-topped box, its ends curved around away from me. Dark varnished wood finished the top edge, following the curves around. I'd have said the material was velvet.

When it bobbed itself around to where I could get a good view, I saw that it was a couch. No, it was what my mama would have called a sofa. It had one long seat with buttons arranged just so on the back. The dark wood came down to the ends of the arms. No Victorian lady ever took that color into her parlor.

I expected the legs to snag on something and hold it there, but the thing just went floating away down the river. I watched it past the willows until it was out of sight. I could just imagine the kind of house that would have had that kind of upholstery in it.

The rain came blowing in, raising such a fuss I wanted to find Mitch's hiding place and join him there. Reminded of what my daddy had said about metal and lightning, I always walked away from my quilting and the tools I used.

As soon as the storm was over Mitch showed up with a grin on his gray tiger face saying, "Feed me!"

"Where were you when I wanted to talk to you? I saw the weirdest thing on the river this morning." I proceeded to tell him about the wildly colored sofa. He fell asleep in the middle of my story.

Just like Josh. Thirty years ago he brought me here to this house on the knoll because *he* liked the solitude. Then he was never home to enjoy it. And if he was home, on rainy days, he slept. I got used to the aloneness but not being idle. I had learned to quilt at my mama's side. That and my precise way of speaking were two things she left me.

When *he* decided we could just tear up our roots and move on, I gave him a flat no.

"But we ain't even natives. It's not like we was deep-rooted with family. Why, you could even take up your old . . ."

"No. We've been here thirty years. I'm used to it. I'm used to not seeing people every minute."

He'd slammed out of the house to go to work on the backhoe's engine.

It was true I was used to the aloneness, not seeing people every day. I saw them often enough in church and when I went to town. I enjoyed a good gossip with the rest of them. I never talked long enough at one time to pick up their soft slurring speech. I think people respected me for that.

The night after the morning when I saw the awful orange sofa I dreamed about it. It was bobbing and bouncing down the river. Just as it got across from where I was standing, it stopped. The water kept running around and past it. "Aha. This time you've hung yourself up."

Then, in the blink of an eye, it turned itself around. When I saw something dark laying in the center of the awful orange, I jumped and woke myself up.

For some reason I was sweating, my gown stuck to me. Ridiculous. All I saw on that ugly sofa was Josh's weatherbeaten black cap with the Copenhagen emblem on it. I laughed it off, but even to me the laugh didn't sound real.

I went to my quilting frame to work the rest of the night. In the morning I was embarrassed by my stitches and pulled them out.

At a decent hour I went to telephone my next neighbor down the river. Marna Bailey, like me, stayed home a lot. She put in her day working in her flower garden. Ever a lady, she'd swathe herself in big hat and sleevelets. To see her later in the mall selling her flowers, you'd never know she was the one who raised them: She was always wishing she could see things beyond that old mall. Outlanders who stopped to look at her flowers had trouble getting away.

Marna was in her garden so much her husband Dawson bought her one of those new wireless phones. I knew I'd get her, even outdoors. If she didn't have her head down in the dirt, she'd have seen that bright orange against the river.

"Marna Bailey." She was a businesswoman who liked to sound like one.

"Lena. Were you outdoors yesterday about ten?"

"Sure. I was settin' stakes until the rain hit. Why?"

"I was down by the river and I saw the strangest thing."

"The river's full of strange things." It was clear that Marna wanted to get back to her flowers.

"Not like this. You wouldn't believe a bright orange Victorian sofa, would you?" I was beginning to wonder about myself. Lena, you're strange. Josh had told me that so often in a half serious way that sometimes I believed it.

"Not really, no. In the first place, Victorian and orange don't, in any way, go together. I was out all mornin'; and I think I'd have noticed anythin' orange floatin' by. Are you bein' whimsical with me?"

"I guess that's it. I'm being whimsical. Goodbye, Marna." I hung up. No wonder I never strolled in the direction of the Bailey place.

I decided against trying anyone upriver. Marna would repeat the conversation to the ladies of the beauty salon. If any of them had seen anything, they'd give me a call.

I didn't have to stroll near the Baileys or anyone else. We had plenty of land of our own. In one corner lay a heap of rotting old logs. Someone had started logging the place once. I guess the price of timber went down and they gave up. Before I got used to not talking to people I'd get restless and climb over those logs. There, and the lot where every big rock on the place had been hauled or pushed. I still go to the rocks sometimes to scrape off a bit of moss. If I keep it damp, it lasts quite awhile in the house. Moss has nice textures.

So many places, I surely didn't need to look up Marna Bailey just for something to do. No, indeed.

I felt uneasy about going to the river, though. Even if this time Mitch, the cat, strolled along with me.

When I realized I was looking at the river out of the corner of my eye, I had to laugh. What on earth was wrong with me? Why was one orange sofa getting to me?

Then I knew. It hadn't been all waterspotted the way pieces



usually were when they came by. Why wasn't there any water-spots?

There must have been a heavy rain upriver. The water was running fast and riley, but nothing floated on it. I breathed a sigh of relief. It was safe to enjoy my break.

"Quite a day, huh, Mitch?" I hadn't even thought to put on my gum boots until I felt the damp soaking into my flat-soled shoes.

I haven't mentioned that I'm a big woman. In fact, Josh and I are about the same size, and all the years of quilting have not softened me. The day they came to get the flatbed truck with the backhoe on it, Dave Menteer, the man who came to drive it, asked me if I wouldn't like to take the rig to the yard, just for a kick. I said no thank you very much. I get my kicks in other ways these days.

It was shortly after that that Mr. Crabtree called.

"Mrs. Holcomb, has Josh been in touch with you?"

"No, but I don't expect he will be for a while. He was mad when he left."

"Mad? At what? I thought he wanted the job." Everybody takes things so personally I knew I shouldn't have said it.

"He did—does. No, he wasn't mad at you. He wanted to sell the place and move me east with him. I couldn't go as soon as he wanted. It came too fast for me."

"The job came up in a hurry. I don't know how to tell you this, but Josh never showed up for work." I didn't say anything. "Lena? Mrs. Holcomb. I should have come in person to tell you this. The police . . ."

"Police?" My voice squeaked.

"Only Sheriff Tarleton. He said it's useless to report a man missing just in case he changed his mind about taking a job."

"I see."

I listened to Mr. Crabtree's apologies, for what I don't know, and went back to piecing a new quilt.

This was before the orange sofa came by.

I'd gotten along quite nicely with not having Josh's muddy clothes to wash or cooking meals that would keep until he finally came home. I could work on my quilts late and early.

The Saturday after the orange sofa, am I going to mark all time by that now, I took a back seat full of quilts to the gift shop in town where outlanders picked them on their way to and from the resorts.

I wanted to tell any number of people I ran into about the bright orange sofa bobbing its way downstream, but as I'm not a talker, I didn't bring it up. Instead, I went to pick up a supply of groceries for myself. When people asked me if I'd heard from Josh I just said not yet.

Mitch the cat was on the doorstep waiting for me. Home. Roots that went down a mile to wrap around the deep buried rocks. They could bury me out there by the rock pile.

That night I dreamed I was standing in the hollow of the cove and the water had turned more red than gray. Now and then a piece of mahogany furniture came floating by, but I didn't pay it much mind. I was watching for something I knew would come again. What would be on it this time?

When I saw the orange spot in the distance, I almost smiled. It came closer and closer. Funny, how it kept its back facing the land. Most things bobbed and turned as the changing currents hit them.

Then, just as it got even with me, the orange sofa made that quick turnaround. I screamed and Mitch howled.

I was sitting up in bed. Mitch was flying down the stairs, snarling the way Josh does every morning. I guess I'd kicked out and threw that old gentleman cat off the bed.

Warm as the night was, I covered myself to my very nose, trying to remember what had stirred me up so.

The sofa, that fried-egg orange sofa. It had seemed funny at first, seeing it skimming, that's what it was doing, as if it had a little outboard motor on one end. It wasn't until it had made that quick turnabout . . .

What I remembered brought me straight up in bed again. A spring in my back had shortened itself—in a hurry.

Funny, I hadn't seen it before the sofa turned. It should have showed above the wood trim on the back.

There'd set a skeleton, grinning about the ride it was having, with its long bony arms resting on its bony lap while the shin bones hung straight down, disappearing into the water. They should have been floating, shouldn't they?

What had really set me off was the cap. The grinning skeleton, thinking it wasn't dressed without the proper headgear, had been wearing Josh's old black Copenhagen cap. Since the day he'd traded headgear with that out-of-state trucker, Josh hadn't been without his Copenhagen cap.

I shivered until the old bed was shaking. Then I got up and

wrapped myself in a hap I'd made out of Josh's old clothes and sat in the big old rocker for the rest of the night.

I didn't go to church that day. I was still sitting in the chair, and it was nearly noon. Only Mitch's stare, directing me to get down to the kitchen, got on my nerves enough to make me move. I folded the hap away and got dressed.

I don't quilt on Sundays, so that afternoon I just hiked around the place. I put on a pair of Josh's old pants and boots and, since it was a drizzly day, his old orange raincape. The drizzle made soft sounds on the cape hood.

I scrambled up onto the big rocks where I could sit watching the deer coming to feed in a neat little clearing that we kept posted against hunters. There I could almost forget the orange sofa with its passenger journeying down to the sea. Peace.

Before long, I was designing a quilt covered with leaves, all shades of green. In my mind's eye I could see myself appliquéing each leaf onto the pure white background. Embroider the veins in the leaves? I hate to embroider. I'd just quilt them in.

When the wood'd filled out, I'd go looking for leaves. I could find enough different ones right here on our own place. Maybe have it ready for the county fair in September. Not for competition. I'd gotten tired of winning blue ribbons away from the other women. Now they ask me to judge.

"Josh! Oh, Josh, I knew you'd come back for me. I knew you wouldn't let me die in this place."

Ever so slowly I turned, and I don't know who was more shook, Marna or me. She went as white as her daylilies. Me, I felt gray. I touched my face, and it felt greasy.

"I thought you were Josh. Those clothes." I could barely hear her.

"They're some he left behind. He didn't take much." I got my feet under me before she did, in a manner of speaking. "That's a pretty dress." Under her transparent raincoat she had on a grayish-blue voile. Would look nice edging my Confederate flag quilt.

"I like to stay dressed up on Sundays." She started doing a kind of sidestep out of there, her full skirt making sounds against the raincoat.

"When did you two have time to meet?" I jumped off the rock. My seat had been wet long enough anyhow.

"A few minutes here and there. You know." She shrugged. Not much to her, tiny waisted, and still wearing her high school hairdo.

She surely was pretty in an aging kind of way.

"No, I didn't know. Did he promise to come back for you?" When was I going to let fly at her? But with what? I'd just gone numb.

"He'd let me know when to meet him." The high school hairdo came up and she was giving me an "I took your man" look. "He said he already told you. You shouldn't be so surprised."

"Well, I am." It had stopped drizzling, so I took off the raincape. Funny, it was about the same shade as the orange sofa.

"He said you'd be sellin' the place an' goin' back to your old occupation."

"No one would hire a heavy equipment operator who hadn't worked at it in thirty years. Mama taught me to be a lady, but Daddy taught me to support myself. And to hold onto what's mine. Like this place."

Instead of looking directly at me, Marna kept moving around looking at the ground around the big rocks.

"Say, these don't look the way they used to. Josh wasn't movin' them around, was he? Just for practice? I thought I heard him back here the day he was to go and I said no, it couldn't be."

"That's funny, Marna. Real funny."

I suppose I shouldn't have made it so easy for her. Now she and Josh come skimming down the river together on that orange sofa while I stand watching from the bank.

The only thing is, they don't just float by in my dreams. They show up during my morning walks, leaning toward each other, while the two of them grin and wave. My feet won't move until they've floated on by, out of sight beyond the overhanging trees.

Maybe tomorrow I won't go back down. Maybe I'll work on my Confederate flag quilt with the grayish-blue voile binding.

There's a little doubt about that. Marna still wears the dress. I know I took it, but she always has it on—the full skirt flaring out over the orange sofa and Josh's legs.

One of these days, I'm thinking, I'll have to swim out to the sofa and take the dress back again. I need it for my quilt, and nothing ever kept me from finishing a quilt to my liking. Not even the fact that I can't swim.



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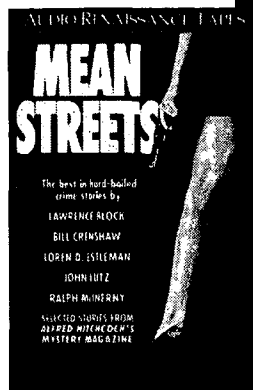
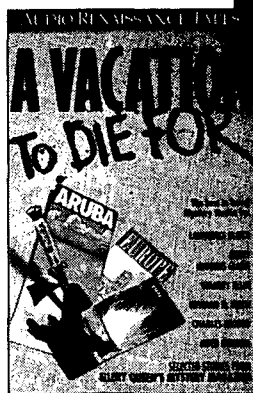
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# They Know Where I Live

by Stanley J. Solomon



The voice on the telephone sounded pretty menacing. "I got a message for you, Lowery. Stay away from Slovo Cami."

"Aw, you should have called me fifteen minutes ago. I just booked hotel reservations."

"Is this Lowery the private dick?"

"Yes. Who's calling, the Albania Tourist Agency?"

"Watch out. You can end up

dead, funnyman."

"Been happening to a lot of people lately. If I could end up any other way, tell me about it. If you have something else to say to me, say it."

"Tough guy, huh? Slovo Cami doesn't want to see you around any more. You have a problem with that, we'll get back to you: we know where you live."

The phone clicked off. I was

sorry I had picked it up, sorry that I had come in to my office late to do some paperwork when everyone else had left hours ago. Normally, I would have let the answering machine handle the midnight caller, but the work was boring and I felt the need for some human interaction. That voice, however, didn't quite qualify. I should have resisted. A threat left on an answering machine loses a lot of its force.

Now, in addition to paying my office bills, I had to worry about Slovo Cami, and wonder who he was and whether I could remember offending anyone recently. In the last couple of weeks, I hadn't had much opportunity to do that, business being a little slack this time of year and my associates being available for whatever work there was.

So who was Slovo Cami? In the morning I could ask around, but if there was somebody waiting for me in the street, I wanted to know now what the risk was. Cautious as I am, I try not to offend anyone, and I really hate to punch out a perfect stranger, even an imperfect one.

I had a friend at the FBI office in New Rochelle who handled organized crime investigations, Terry Flanagan. Although he wouldn't be working

the swing shift, I figured maybe using his name could get me the information. I dialed the office and got a human voice which told me to call back the next morning, but when I insisted on speaking to an agent, I was put through to Agent John Steele.

"My name's Raymond Lowery, and I'm a friend, a good friend, of Terry Flanagan. I wonder if there's anybody in the organized crime task force office who can give me some general—not secret—information about a gangster."

"Hey, man, this is the middle of the night, and we're not the public library anyway."

"Do you know Terry?"

"I can't give you information about our agents, assumed or otherwise, over the phone. What do you think we do here?"

I let the straight line pass. What the hell do they do at regional headquarters at midnight? He must have been interrupted watching Johnny Carson. I said, with a bit of restraint, "Look, Steele, I'm an investigator who has cooperated a lot of times with the FBI. I want only some public information. Maybe you don't know anything, but you can try to answer a civil question, so let's start over. Basically, all I want to know is who is Slovo Cami, and whether he operates in the

New York City area."

There was a silence for a moment at the other end. Apparently Agent Steele was balancing his options: argue with me or tell me something. Finally, I heard him cough and say, "What's your name again, your address, and your telephone number?"

"How about my date of birth and social security number?" But I immediately gave him what he asked for. Then, without another word, he hung up. Three minutes later my phone rang.

"Lowery, this is Agent Steele. I can't give you any information over the phone that relates to our files. But you can ask me some questions, and maybe I can tell you something you might find out anyway from other sources. Terry says you're all right."

"Thank him for the testimonial. I'll repeat what I said before: who is Slovo Cami? Is he in organized crime?"

"I can't comment on whether we have a file on any such individual who you suspect is a member of the underworld. But if we had such a file, he might be and he might not."

"Some answer. Let me try this. Is he part of an organized gang or a solo gangster?"

"That sounds like the same question you just asked. He

might be a member of a family, but not necessarily in his immediate geographic area. Then again, maybe not. I'm not saying—"

"Is he dangerous?"

"He might be. Anyone can be dangerous."

"How old is he?"

"He could be thirty, that is, if he had a file here that I knew about."

"How old could he be if he doesn't?"

"Huh?"

This was getting to be an exasperating game. I thought maybe I should wait till tomorrow when Flanagan came on duty. But I had gone this far into absurdity with Agent Steele, so what could I lose by continuing but sleep? "Let me put it a different way. I received a telephoned threat from someone on behalf of Cami. I don't want to make a complaint. I just want to know whether I have to worry crossing the street."

"What you want to know is whether he might shoot you for following him around or spying on him, right?"

"No, wrong. I'm not working on him. He's made a mistake, and I just want to know whether his mistake can cost me."

"What did you do to annoy him?"



"I don't know."

"So maybe it's a mistake, and maybe not."

It occurred to me that Agent Steele wasn't playing games, that his mind just worked with maybe this and maybe that. I held the phone silently, wondering what would happen if I didn't ask another question. I heard him start to breathe heavily.

Finally he said, "Possibly, this guy Cami has a small-size operation in the Bronx, and you stumbled onto something that's dangerous to him, like a piece of evidence you might turn in to the FBI—that is, if we were investigating him in the first place. If I were you, I might want to keep out of the Bronx neighborhood around Parkchester like if your car needed to be painted go someplace else, but that's up to you. Anyway, I wish you good luck staying away from Slovo Cami, if he warned you to and if he's an organized crime figure."

"Well, thank you, Agent Steele, if indeed you are Agent Steele, for letting me know that if there is a Slovo Cami, who may be threatening me, I might be advised to stay out of his way, if indeed that's the best I could do, under whatever circumstances exist that I may or may not know anything about." I hung up.

When I put my coat on a little while later, I stood for a minute with my hand on the doorknob, then went over to the safe, took out an automatic, loaded a clip, and dropped it into my pocket. I hadn't carried for nearly a year.

For a day I thought about Slovo Cami and looked over my shoulder. I figured it was a mistake that would work itself out. Two days after I received the call, I got to my office near noon. Miss Weskitt, my office manager, said to me, "A big man in a black overcoat asked for you an hour ago. I don't think he was a client."

"No? What do you think he was?"

"I think he was a gangster. He had another thug with him who stood at the door, just outside the office. Of course, I pushed the alert button for Noel Callahan's desk. He was the only one around, and he came out with his hand in his pocket. But the man in the black overcoat was already leaving, as soon as I told him you were out for the day. He didn't leave a name, but he looked like he just stepped out of a police lineup."

"Could be any of my cousins," I said with a slight smile. Miss Weskitt is very competent in

dealing with undesirables. We get a few, and we have a system of warnings in each of the inner offices. Still, it put me on the alert again. A personal visit is one step up on the threat index.

I called Terry Flanagan at the FBI. We exchanged a few pleasantries, saying we had to get together for lunch, and then I asked him about Slovo Cami. "Terry, I spoke to Agent Steele the other night about a guy named Slovo Cami who has got it in his head that I'm bothering him. Now, if this guy is dangerous, I want to get in touch with him and find out what's his problem, or rather my problem."

"He's a young hotshot, a nephew of a now-deceased capo, operates out of the Bronx in a pasta place off Tremont Avenue, Filippo's, of which he is a silent partner. We'll get him one of these days, Raymond, but not in the next couple of months. In that time, he might kill three or four guys. He's still making a name for himself, so he's got to be ruthless. What are you going to do?"

"Go see him and tell him it's a mistake."

"That could be an even bigger mistake."

"You think he'd shoot me in the restaurant?"

"You'd make some crack that would offend him—or say

something he didn't understand and had to interpret as a crack in front of the boys. No, he wouldn't kill you or else you'd be dead already. But he could hurt you. Whatever you're doing to bother him, he's giving you a chance to stop."

"So what have I got to lose by seeing him?"

"You've still got ten fingers and other parts."

"At last count. He sent around a couple of goons to my office today, but I wasn't in. What else can I do, write him a letter?"

"Can't you figure out what's bugging him? Maybe it's one of your other cases. These guys don't like it when you start poking around any of their friends."

"I'll think about it," I said.

"Knowing you, I can't give the advice I'd give anyone else in difficulty with the mob: get out of town for a while. I know you wouldn't admit to being afraid of these mugs, but you read the papers. You know they can get crazy even without guns. I'll give you a name you might contact at that Bronx restaurant where Cami hangs out: Tony Jacardi, or Jack the Knife as they refer to him when he's not around. He's a lieutenant to Slovo, but he's older and partly rational, and he'd know what your sin is. Tell him you

are going to repent.”

**T**he most direct way to get to Slovo was just to walk in on him while he held court at the restaurant. In spite of my friend's warning, I didn't think the situation would be particularly dangerous. Cami was a hood, all right, but he couldn't risk his business and maybe an investigation by strongarming anyone who walked through the door. Assuming that some customers there didn't belong to his gang, I felt pretty safe going in.

Parking a couple of blocks from Filippo's, I strolled over to Tremont Avenue, trying to look as casual as possible. The neighborhood of small shops was almost deserted. Outside a closed liquor store, I stopped and looked catty-cornered across the street about fifty yards away. There was a small lit neon sign that said, simply, FILIPPO'S. It seemed a good idea to spend a few minutes in the doorway watching.

It wasn't a busy night. After ten minutes, only one couple had entered, but it wasn't yet ten o'clock and I wanted to watch some of the regulars drop by.

Suddenly, Filippo's door opened and two guys in identical leather-trimmed black

overcoats almost tumbled through in a hurry to take up posts right outside. They were big men, and though they probably didn't look at all alike, their size and their coats gave the impression of their being twins. They stood together at the corner, one looking up and down Tremont Avenue, the other up and down the intersecting street.

I had gotten as far back as possible in the doorway though the street lamp might have thrown some light on me from their position. My hand touched the gun in my coat pocket for reassurance, but I didn't take it out. Then one of them shouted to the other, "Over there, across the street."

Just as they had stood practically shoulder to shoulder, the two ran in unison in my direction, crossing the street diagonally. But they hadn't drawn guns, and I wasn't going to be the first to do so. They ran quickly for big men, and I moved forward to be ready for them.

And then I was almost bowled over, but not by them. A pudgy guy who had been standing in a doorway a couple of stores ahead of mine—whom I hadn't even noticed in spite of his rather huge and lumpy silhouette—dashed past me like the Flash. The two hoods

were chasing him—and I knew him: Fleet Freddy Kalarty, so named because of the improbable speed he was able to generate under pressure to avoid the thugs and roughnecks that our mutual profession on rare occasions affords. This was one of those occasions, and Kalarty was living up to his nickname. Of course, being a big man who seemed to be totally out of shape, Fleet Freddy ran by huffing and puffing, but as he proceeded down the block, he increased the distance between him and his pursuers. Although driven by a fear of violence unequalled by anyone else, Kalarty had a reputation within the trade as a dogged stakeout man, a thoroughgoing, if not particularly creative, investigator of straying spouses. He deserved his fame. The two thugs gave up halfway down the block.

One of them shouted at the disappearing P.I., "We know where you live, Lowery!"

And so the mystery was solved in a pretty obvious, though somewhat degrading, manner. Somehow I had been mistaken for Freddy Kalarty, twice my weight and twice my dumbness—and I can be pretty dumb when I try hard, like when I pay a night visit to the territorial base of an organized crime figure.

I had stepped out of the doorway shadows into the street to watch the race, and now the two goons had turned around before I could slip back in. So I just stood there, leaning up against the plate glass window display of White Rose and two dollar wines, looking casually at the men. They strode side by side, trying to imitate their favorite movie heavies. All at once I suddenly noticed another figure in a dark coat standing about ten feet behind me and to one side, watching. His coat seemed to match the other guys' uniforms; they must all subscribe to *Gangsters' Bazaar*.

The two men approaching me weren't really going to stop. They had something to say to the newcomer, something between an excuse and an apology: "Ya see that, Jack? That guy was greased lightning. We turned the corner, and Lowery was two blocks ahead. No chance of catching him."

I looked at the guy they called Jack, certain he was Jack the Knife Jacardi. He was scowling at them, obviously not too pleased with their effort. Then he glanced at me.

One of the troops, the apolo-gizer, followed his glance, possibly sensing an opportunity to get back into Jack's good graces, and said, "You know what you seen? You seen noth-

ing. Nothing at all.”

I should have kept still, but I didn't like the way they walked, as if they owned the street; and I didn't like their black overcoats with the big pockets and the guns I supposed they contained. So I answered, “Just the start of the circus parade—three elephants got loose and one got away, but the other two got winded ten yards from their cage.”

They weren't too bright, but they could figure that I had insulted them in front of the guy who maybe evaluated them for their promotions. It was enough to make the two of them advance toward me, ready to demonstrate their talents. I held my ground, my right hand grasping the automatic in my pocket. If I were as fast as Fleet Freddy, I might have run. If I were as smart as he was, I might have joined him when he ran past.

Without smarts or speed, I just had to bluff it out. I took a step forward, my hand still in my pocket, and said, “Keep your hands in sight. And don't try to impress Jacardi: he won't even send your mothers a wreath.” They stopped and looked to Jacardi for further orders. He hadn't moved a step or changed his expression. But he was weighing choices. They were mumbling indistinctly

about what they might do to me for disturbing their home turf. Don't they realize that no neighborhood is safe these days?

Finally Jacardi shrugged. He said, “It's not worth nothing. Go back and have a drink. Cool off.”

They looked at each other. They looked at me. Since they weren't really sure I had a gun, they felt uneasy about not even testing my bluff, but their first duty was obedience. They marched slowly across the street, leaving their leader standing near me. At the door to Filippo's they stopped and took up posts, but Jacardi gestured with his hand and they went inside.

Jacardi held a tight little grin to his pinched face. He was a graying, middle-aged man who had spent a lifetime facing down enemies. He knew how to act, how to keep his own cool, how to seem dangerous even when in danger himself—but he also knew how to stay alive in a high-mortality job. He said, “You're a natural wise-guy. What's your name?”

“What's the difference? You're not going to read about this in the papers.”

“Could be. I read the obituaries. Anyway, come on in to Filippo's joint. I'll buy you a drink.”

"Not tonight. Maybe sometime. I know where you live."

Some people, that is, real people, not hoods, had moved into the street. I felt the odds had shifted two to one in my favor so I could walk away. Well, maybe only nine to five, but I did it. I turned abruptly and headed for my car. It wasn't a really good night for any of us, and I went home.

I had intended to call Kallarty the next morning to tell him that I had witnessed his latest record-setting dash. Maybe he could tell me how the mixup happened and get me off the hook, though I had no expectation that he would respond willingly where any degree of danger to himself was involved. I didn't think that the mob was mad enough to shoot either Kallarty or me, though they wouldn't flinch at a good-natured tap on the head with a baseball bat.

When I got to the office, Miss Weskitt informed me that a client was waiting, a young woman who had given her name as Tootsie Ragone and who had filled out a form that gave her address as Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Since I almost never get clients from the Bronx, I immediately sensed a connection with last night's en-

counter. I went into my office eagerly, having always wanted to meet a girl named Tootsie. Do you call her Tootsie or Hey, Babe?

Taking no chances, I introduced myself, sat down in the chair behind my desk, swiveled into a commanding position, and said, "Now, Miss Ragone, what can I do for you?"

She was an attractive brunette of about twenty-four, rather slenderly built, wearing a green dress. It was her formal dress, the kind one preserves for business occasions if one is not a businessperson. She said, "Mr. Lowery, I'm here on a confidential matter. I need to have someone investigated."

"Is that person related to you? I ask because we don't handle marital situations, and the only family matters we do are missing persons."

"I was told that you were exactly the best person in the detective profession to look into the situation that concerns the man I am engaged to marry."

"What is it that you want to find out about him?"

"I want to know what his business is, Mr. Lowery. He tells me he is a partner in small restaurants and newsstands, but I don't know what to believe. A friend of mine has heard from someone that Slovo—my fiancé's name is



Slovo Cami—may be involved in the rackets.”

I was struck, of course, by the farfetched coincidence that could not really be a coincidence. I tried not to show my surprise and said mildly, “Well, you can never totally trust anyone these days.”

She thought about that for a moment. “I do trust Slovo . . . mostly. I mean, he’s so kind and goodhearted I can’t believe . . . well, some of the things people say about him being part of the empire of organized crime are just unbelievable.”

If she didn’t want to dump him, it was her choice. After all, most hoods do marry. Most find some compatibility with some housebound childbearer, some servant-wife who provides them with the front of respectability or refuge from the slings, arrows, and bullets of their outrageous fortunes. I wasn’t so much interested in the social issue as in my connection to it. How the hell did Slovo get on my case before I got on his?

“Who recommended me?” I interrupted. “And when?”

She hesitated a moment, summoned up some courage, and went on. “Very late last night you were recommended by Frederick L. Kalarty, a private detective I had previously

hired to find out . . . Mr. Kalarty called last night and said that the press of out-of-town business would take all his time, and he was mailing me back my retainer. He said you were the best man for the job.”

“Out of town, is he. I’m surprised he stopped running long enough to telephone you.”

“Running?”

“Just a trade joke, Miss Ragone. Running after culprits. It was very thoughtful of him to recommend me—because of my investigative abilities.” For a moment, my own irony worked itself into my brain and calmed me. Fleet Freddy the coward wanted me involved to cover himself—so that the threats made against him in my name would eventually find me. He had just found out last night that Cami’s gang had spotted him and somehow thought he was me; otherwise, he would have been off the case before last night. But that didn’t excuse his putting the dogs on me without a warning.

Almost immediately the warning came. Miss Weskitt on the intercom asked, as if on cue, whether I could speak to Freddy Kalarty on an “urgent business matter.” I told her to switch the call to an empty office, and I excused myself from Miss Ragone and dashed through the door.

I was connected to the cherubic high-pitched voice, filled with feigned good humor, of Freddy the Fink. He was saying, "Ray, buddy, haven't spoken to you for a while. We've got to get together for a drink—I'm buying. Listen, I'm calling because I recommended a client to you who wants to track down the business activities of her boyfriend, a guy named Slovo Cami. I'm up to my neck with clients so I can't take her case myself, but I thought you with your staff could handle the matter in a day and charge the lady for a week. Name's Tootsie Ragone. The boyfriend does not look kosher to me—I mean, he's got a small police record, mainly juvenile stuff, and a reputation for some criminal activities. But it's an easy job for you, so I sent her around to talk to you. Find out if Cami goes with the wrong crowd, write her a report, and earn an easy grand. I'll even give you his address."

"Freddy, you ball of slime, I happened to see your footrace last night with a couple of Slovo's boys, and I heard them call you Lowery. You didn't stop to explain the mistake."

"Well, if you saw it, you know why. Hey, Ray, what's the problem? I'm just throwing a little business your way. Professional courtesy."

"Professional setup, you mean! Let me tell you something, Freddy, when the heat from Slovo cools off in a couple of weeks, you better stay out of town for another year—professional courtesy from me."

"Aw, Ray, buddy, I didn't know till last night that those stumblebums had gotten us mixed up."

He was an exasperating character, playing both the teddy bear and ironist at the same time, but Kalarty was always mainly a con artist.

"Okay," I said deliberately, allowing just a slight touch of controlled anger in my voice, "let me put it clearly. One of Cami's men shouts 'Lowery' at your back, and you keep running and don't tell me about it. No surprise to you because you had planted something of mine with the Cami mob."

"What do you mean 'planted something'? Is handing out your card by mistake planting something?" He put some indignation into his voice, or raised it an octave, and continued: "Geez, Ray, give me some credit. I was questioning some guy named Jacardi about his pal Cami, and I reached into my wallet and gave him your card by mistake. I always carry a bundle of my own cards, but I must have run out of them. That's the only way I could

think of how they got your name from me. I don't go around impersonating P.I.'s. Hey, Ray, I got my own license."

"If you got a license, it must have been during a state campaign for equal opportunity for the retarded. How the hell can you go around handing out my card, which you must have stolen from my office?"

"You leave them around—who knows—but sometimes I might want to send you some business, like now with this lady Tootsie Ragone."

"The only business you want to send me are those two sentries of Slovo Cami."

I'd gotten what I needed from Fleet Freddy and had cooled off for the moment. When I got off the phone, I had the immediate problem of what to do for—or to—Tootsie, the innocent who was about to go into the tank with a shark.

Resuming my conference with Tootsie, I tried to measure her esteem for the man she was to marry. She was, I guess, pretty impressed with him. Although I'd never met him, I could readily imagine that Cami was a smooth talker and a man who liked to show off his power and his money. He might have diamond rings on both hands, and under his shirt a

chain with human teeth.

She told me that a couple of her friends had heard from their boyfriends that Slovo was surrounded by "not nice people. They were people who might be fighting a lot, who pulled out . . . weapons."

"Yeah, and they wear black coats and scare schoolchildren. What do you think, Tootsie?"

"Maybe he could give up seeing those friends."

"And join the Wednesday night bowling team? Perhaps, Tootsie, but don't you wonder how he got friends like them?"

"They're vulgar, stupid. Slovo, he can sometimes speak roughly to other people—never to me. He doesn't curse or anything when he speaks to me. He's not like them. He went to college."

"The College of Hard Knocks, as they used to say?"

She corrected me: "City College. He studied liberal arts. He was going to be a lawyer, but he came from a poor family and had to go to work."

"I'm sure he's retained his interest in legal matters, Tootsie. But let's face it, you're not here because you heard rumors about your boyfriend. You must really know, and you want someone to say there's no proof. And there is no legal proof or he'd be in jail. I'll tell you that much without your

hiring me. If you marry him, the best you can hope for is that when that proof shows up, his lawyers are able to find ways around it, or witnesses will disappear."

"What do you mean by disappear?"

"In either sense. People who witness crimes by mobsters sometimes walk off bridges wearing cement shoes. But other times they're like Freddy Kalarty—they see trouble ahead and decide to visit South America."

"Did Mr. Kalarty go to South America?"

I laughed. "No, he wouldn't have to go that far—only across the George Washington Bridge. You see, your fiancé's friends and helpers saw Freddy—and even though they don't know his name or his reason for bothering about them, they chased him away. That's why he sent you to me."

She looked downcast. "Maybe I could be a good influence on him, like a softening touch." She didn't really believe that.

"You think you might get him to put felt over his brass knuckles?"

"You think Slovo's going to be a lifetime of trouble. You're telling me to break it off."

That's what I was advising, if counseling were my business. But it was none of my business.

My license was for something else. I said, "What do I know? You look like a smart young woman. Maybe you could take it, marriage to the mob, I mean, and find it worth the trouble. But I'm not going to lay it out for you any clearer than that. Kalarty was mistaken. My agency doesn't handle matchmaking or mismatchmaking."

We talked for a while further, but her mind was moving along the right track. When she left, she thanked me as if I had been her psychiatrist, guiding her to a new insight. But she paid me my usual consultation fee as a private eye, that is, humble thanks and fond farewells.

I still had to clear up my problem with Slovo Cami's gang because I didn't want to spend the next month checking doorways when I went up those mean streets that Chandler wrote about—meaning, I suppose, the Bronx, as well as L.A.

In my line of work, you can't entirely avoid dealing with lowlifes, though in these more prosperous times I don't often encounter them. Based on a lot of experience twenty years ago when I worked the gumshoe interview routines for lawyers, I knew that to get rid of mobsters, you can't plead the cause

of justice—only the guys at the top, the dons, listen to justice; the mechanics don't make decisions, they just do what requires the least amount of thinking. Mistaken identity? Well, that's bad luck. They'll beat you up anyway to keep in practice. Then they'll go after the guy they meant to get in the first place. The only way to deal with them is to deal. But what did I have to offer Slovo Cami?

Or Tony "Jack the Knife" Jacardi?

I called Filippo's. The bartender who answered claimed he never heard of Jack the Knife. I never heard of a bartender who ever heard of whoever you asked for. Whomever. I said, "Find someone in the place who looks like he'd be called Jack the Knife and whisper in his ear that the guy he offered to buy a drink for last night wants to take him up on it."

All I heard was a grunt. The receiver was put down on the bar, and I could hear the background sounds. Not too bad. Sinatra was working the joint with "Luck Be a Lady Tonight." Exactly my feelings. Then he started singing "After I'm Gone," and I was glad when Jacardi picked up the phone.

"You tell me your name this time, mister, or I hang up on

you," he growled.

"That's why I called you, to give you my name. I'm Raymond Lowery. We weren't properly introduced last night."

"Lowery was the rocket we watched take off down the block. You sound like the wiseguy I met, and maybe you're working with Lowery. So what do you want?"

"Peace and quiet from you and Slovo and your door-openers in the black coats."

"There's no peace and quiet this side of the grave, trooper, but there we can arrange something for you."

"Arrange this: in exchange for information about the guy who is really bothering you, the one you call Lowery, you stop making phone calls to me, you forget where I live."

The man on the other end was thinking. Exec-level gangsters are all big calculators. Crime is business, even the muscle part of it. There was nothing particular for him or Slovo in bashing the heads of all the people who annoyed them. On the other hand, if someone was investigating them, they needed to know that. In about half a minute he came back with "Give me a name, one I can check out."

"How about FBI? Look them up in the encyclopedia."

"FBI? You're screwing me,

wiseguy. This fat Lowery who gave me his card wasn't FBI. He couldn't pass the physical."

"Ask the horses you sent after him last night. You saw yourself. But why argue? Between you and me, the FBI is watching Slovo Cami for reasons I don't know. They send this slobby-looking agent when they want to pretend it's private, not government."

"The questions he asked me were private, about Slovo's personal life, like who he was seeing. Why would the FBI want to know that?"

"They like to keep their files on every American up to date. Why ask me? They might even have a file on Raymond Lowery."

"The fast fat guy?"

"I mean me. Aren't you listening? Why would I be pretending to be Raymond Lowery to you people when you call me up and tell me to lay off? The FBI just passed you a card they got from me—or maybe they made up their own bunch. At fifty bucks a thousand, I don't go passing them out in batches."

"So who's the FBI fat fink that's been tailing Slovo for the last couple of days?"

That, of course, was my big chance to score one against Fleet Freddy Kalarty. It was probably a harmless gesture, too, since if Slovo bought the FBI tale, there was no chance he'd go any further with Kalarty. But then again, Kalarty's detective agency is listed in the Brooklyn directory, and there was indeed some chance that Jacardi might run across the name someday and feel he had been suckered. Then he might start looking around. No, I couldn't do it to Fearful Freddy, the rabbit of the investigative profession.

"His name," I said "is John Steele. Agent Steele, works out of New Rochelle."

"I'll look it up."

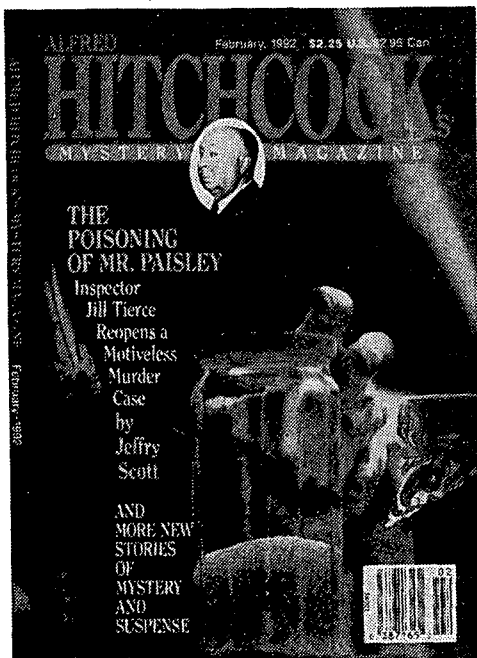
"You going to call him where he lives?"

"Are you kidding? FBI? No, I'm just gonna call you if there's no such person."

He clicked off.

After I hung up, I put the automatic back in my safe. Then I told Miss Weskitt I was taking off for the day, and I went to a Bogart movie in the Village, *Beat the Devil*. This happened a year ago. I haven't heard since from Slovo's boys. And I haven't moved either.





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FICTION



# Blind Panic

by Anne Peverell

Illustration by Jim Adams

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**H**ot, tired, and angry, Laurie stood at the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes as if her life depended on it. Behind her, on the kitchen table, leaned four drunken-looking plastic bags bulging with the provisions Iris deemed essential for her family's survival over the weekend. It had been quite a day—and it wasn't over yet.

To start with, they'd overslept. Which meant that, after getting the rest of the family off, she'd been late getting to the law firm where she worked mornings. It had been panic stations there, too, and even as she was leaving, old Batko had shoved some urgent photocopying at her. Important documents, apparently, for the court that afternoon.

After she'd finally got away, she'd whirled round the supermarket, flinging food and cleaning stuff into her trolley and only just managing to catch the later—crowded—bus home. On the doorstep, she'd scabbled in her organizer bag for her keys, only to discover—tucked neatly into “their” compartment—her potato peeler.

She'd stood staring down at it in total disbelief. Finally, *You fool*, she scolded herself. She'd obviously been in such a state of blind panic that morning

that, without thinking, she'd grabbed up the peeler, leaving her keys on the draining board.

And that was where she found them after dragging the ladder out of the garage, clambering up it, and thumping open the bedroom window. The one with the faulty lock.

Laurie snatched up the keys, making straight for the front door and her shopping, abandoned outside. There'd be no time for the usual calming cup of tea, she thought, or time to put her feet up as she usually did. The kids would be home from school soon, expecting a meal on the table, and Ron, she remembered suddenly, was also due home shortly after. Earlier than usual, anyway—some meeting at the bowling club—and he'd need feeding before he went. That all had to be prepared and the shopping put away before then.

Giving up altogether trying to keep to “my routine,” she swiftly filled the sink with water and potatoes and began hacking at them.

Beside her, the local station on the radio nattered softly while she continued to seethe. There are going to be some *changes* made round here, she promised herself, digging viciously at the eyes in one white tuber before slamming it to join its pale fellows in the colander.

Seizing another: *He'll* just have to give me more help—remembering, resentfully, *Him*, on this or that committee, PTA, Bowling Club, something that meant he could go swanning off, evenings and weekends, while she stayed at home. Doing the housework.

The top of the hour time-check sounded from the radio. Was that the time *already*? Better get a move on—and the announcer was finishing the main news story as she finished.

“... a long-term prisoner has escaped from the local jail. The police say he is *extremely* plausible and dangerous. If you are at all suspicious, do not attempt to apprehend him yourself but ring the police . . .”

Her attention diverted, Laurie began calming down, even started to listen to the next program. But as if intent on provoking her, it turned out to be an interview with some local female do-gooder. When the interviewer gushed, “It’s always the *busiest* of women who find time to squeeze in that *extra* job,” Laurie said something extremely rude and switched off. Just as a thump sounded from upstairs, followed by the unmistakable sound of muffled footsteps.

At the same time Laurie remembered the ladder, still

leaning against the front of the house. She whirled about, feeling suddenly weak. Supposing—just supposing—that by some bizarre coincidence, while she had been listening to that warning about the escaped convict, he had—was *actually*—? Trembling, she forced herself out into the hall, to investigate.

It wasn’t, of course. It was Satchmo, their fat tabby cat, returning home for his dinner. Relieved but angry again at the thought of yet another meal that she was expected to get, Laurie shooed the animal downstairs. Halfway down, she froze. Blocking the way, grinning up at her insolently, was a sallow-faced, unshaven youth. *Him*. No doubt about it, for:

“Money—” he began.

“Money?” she echoed, stupidly.

“Yeah. You know. Green stuff, darlin’. Lemonade—you owe four weeks—”

“*Lemonade?*” she repeated. (Who was he trying to kid?) He certainly wasn’t the roundsman. Although she never bought the soft drinks he peddled from his clapped-out lorry that called round once a week, she knew dirty old Arnie. Everyone did. And anyway, she thought, panic rising and settling in her throat like a bitter little fist, today wasn’t the day

for Arnie's lorry. It was tomorrow when he'd be blocking the entrance to the tiny close, making it impossible to drive in or out while he did the rounds of his regulars. She heard the announcer's voice again: "*Extremely* plausible—"

It's him. It's *him*, the inner voice was clamoring. Play along, it said. Act dumb. Cash. That's all he wants—

"Of course," her voice fluted, unnaturally high. "My purse is out here."

Her heart pumping, she led him out to the kitchen, to her handbag, still on the draining board. Did he intend grabbing it? He could have it—all of it. She saw his hand, reaching out, the letters L-O-V-E tattooed on the fingers of one hand and H-A-T-E on the other. He was close to her by now—too close, the voice warned—and the panic suddenly became another, more primitive, fear. *Do* something, the voice was

screaming, and instinctively, Laurie grabbed up the nearest thing, the potato peeler, whirled round, and plunged the sharp end at his pale face. There wasn't even time for him to wipe that silly grin off his face.

Arnie, retiring at the end of the week and therefore collecting his cash a day early, while at the same time showing Cousin Wayne the ropes, pushed at the unfamiliar front door with the bunch of keys still dangling from the lock.

"What you playin' at, boy?" he called, genuinely puzzled. Hearing a noise coming from the direction of the kitchen, he called again: "It ain't *this* house. It's her in Number *One* as owes—"

He stood in the hall, head cocked on one side, while the funny noises, like a dog in pain, went on. At last his curiosity got the better of him, and he shuffled forward, towards the kitchen door.

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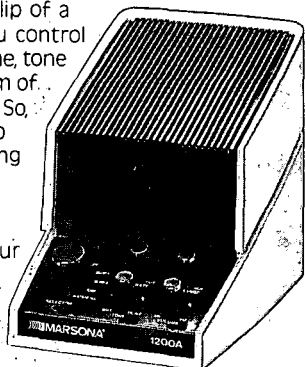
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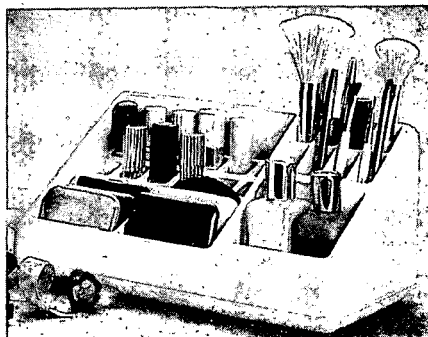
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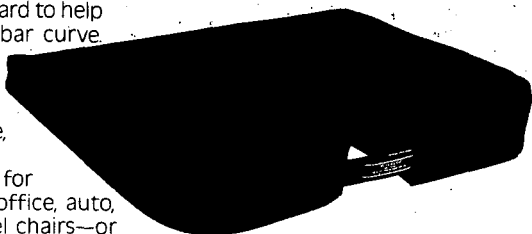


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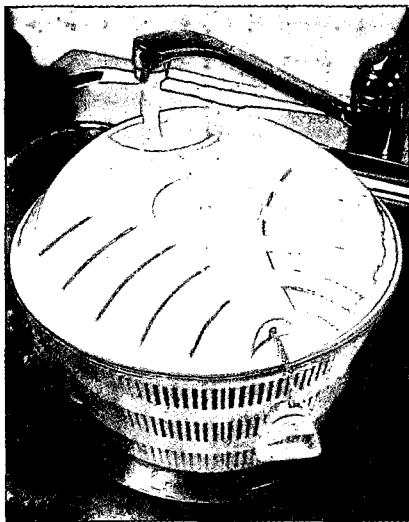


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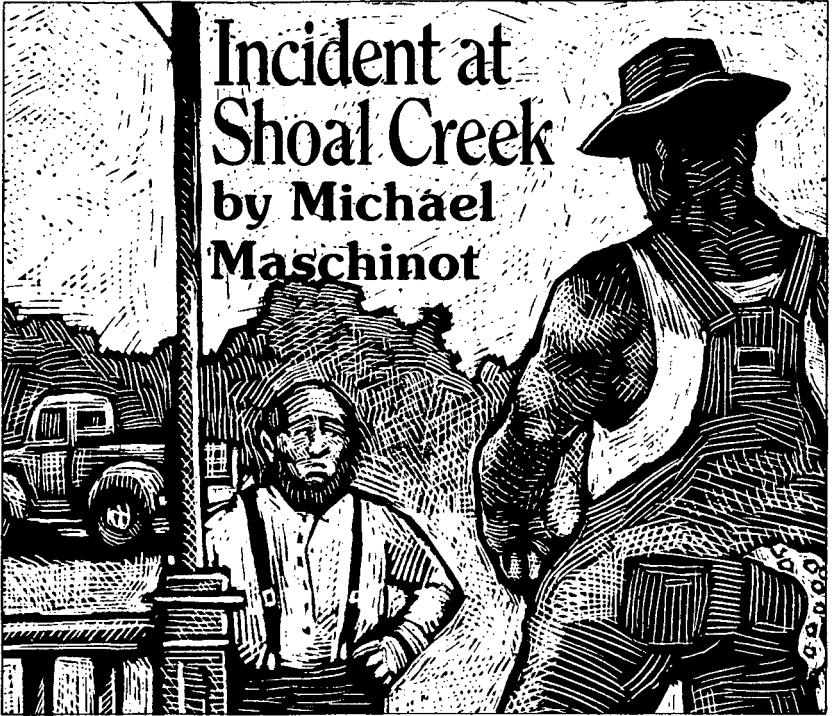
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# Incident at Shoal Creek

by Michael Maschinot



**“H**ush, Thor!” said my father, and the Great Dane quieted and slunk to a corner of his pen.

Dolly and I manned our stations at the kitchen window, watching Daddy watching Mr. Tomcik’s rusty green truck come grattling up the driveway. Mother remained at the table, forking and reforking her green beans as she waited for the business to conclude. My father, not a man to have his pork chops and biscuits interrupted lightly, stood on the porch cussing and spitting. Thor growled. “Hush!” said Daddy.

The truck sputtered to a stop and Mr. Tomcik stepped out with his hat in his hand. The late afternoon sun made his normally pale face look ruddy. He was a head taller than Daddy and an arm thicker, yet he seemed cowed by the older man.

“Evening, Tomcat,” Daddy said easily. He did not invite Mr.

Tomcik to step onto the porch, and from where we watched he towered over him like Christ on the cross.

"Been meaning to talk to you, Mr. Milliken," said Mr. Tomcik, wiping his neck with a handkerchief, "'bout that dam of yours."

My father nodded gravely, which sent the battered hat spinning round its axis in slow circles in Tomcat's stubby fingers as he blinked up at the house. Tomcat was nearsighted, and as he squinted from sunlight into shadow he couldn't have seen that behind the somber facade Daddy's eyes twinkled with the love of a good joke.

Tomcat was called Tomcat only because of his last name. In disposition he was more like a bull—big, thick, slow to anger, and once angered, hard to stop. Not many Polish immigrants inhabited the southern Blue Ridge after the second war, and even fewer before the war, which is when the Tomciks had settled on the vacant farmland downstream of us. When Daddy went to fight for freedom in Europe, Mr. Tomcik stayed behind with his wife and his son Heywood, who was just a toddler. Even though Tomcat had become an American citizen, he missed the draft because of his poor eyes.

When Daddy came home, he built a dam across Shoal Creek to make a small lake—really a pond, but it was always "the lake" to us. The lake lay along the southern edge of our land where the spurs of two hills joined to channel the creek to its narrowest point. Daddy knew Tomcat didn't like the dam, but as he explained to us, the lake provided a breeding place for brim and catfish, a good hole for swimming, and, most important, a natural barrier to keep our cows from crossing into the east garden and trampling our crops.

"Well, sir, the water on my land is way down. Way down." Mr. Tomcik gestured with his hand, palm down.

"Still got water, ain't you?"

"Yes, but I want to dig irrigation ditch. Can't get enough water to do this."

"Been working your land five, six, seven years now without no irrigation, ain't you?"

Tomcat scraped the dust with his heels, like a hen scratching for grubs or a bull digging in for the charge. "Yes, but I got new field cleared for potato."

"Taters? Taters?" Daddy laughed, a good-natured lilt in his voice, as though Tomcik had said "baseball bats." "Is that all? Hell,

Tomcat, taters don't hardly need no watering at all. Just a couple buckets in the morning, 'fore the sun gets at 'em." He took a pouch of tobacco from his pocket and pinched off a plug.

"Mr. Milliken," said Tomcat, his voice aquiver, "I grow potato all my life. I know how to grow this."

"Well, shoot, come up the porch and have a chaw. We'll discuss it." Daddy sat on one of the rockers.

Tomcat stepped gingerly up to the porch, testing each of the three stairs as though it might collapse. He sat in the rocker my father offered, laid his hat in his lap, and accepted a short plug of tobacco from the pouch. Tomcat didn't chaw and Daddy knew it. Tomcat smiled—and what a painful smile it was—as he stuffed the plug under his lip. My sister giggled, and I swatted her on the arm. I could hear my mother's fork scratching her plate in tiny strokes.

"Now, then," Daddy was saying, "suppose you tell me everything about raising taters."

"Mr. Milliken, I don't come here to talk about potato. I come to talk about stream. Stream belong to everybody. Everybody need it. If one person change it, everybody suffer."

My father nodded grimly at the big farmer. Then he spit. There is an art to spitting tobacco, and Daddy had mastered it. There were no spittoons or coffee cans or anything of the kind on the porch because, wide as it was, Daddy was able to spit his juice clear off the edge where the dust soaked it up.

"Everybody suffers? I don't hear no one else complaining."

"Where I come from, if one person suffer, then all suffer."

Tomcat was beginning to realize his predicament: he had nowhere to spit. If he aimed for the yard and missed, which was likely, he'd splatter the porch to his shame. If he got up and walked to the edge of the porch and spit off it, he'd be admitting his inferiority. Daddy just sat there with his eyes twinkling, watching Tomcat sweat, appraising him, maybe a bit disappointed in him for not putting up a better fight.

"You get that from the Bible, Tomcat, or from a law book somewhere?"

Our neighbor's face was turning red and his eyes were watering from the sting of nicotine. "I don't know law. I know what is right. I know what is fair."

"Well," Daddy said, shifting back to a comfortable position in his chair, "I realize I'm only a Christian, but let me state my position

on what I think is right and what I think is fair. I think it's fair to say I come here first. I think it's right that my folk have farmed this piece of land since cotton days. I think it's fair to say I thought about damming Shoal Creek a long time 'fore you decided to think about digging some irrigation ditch for your tater patch. And not only thought about it, I done it, without asking no one's permission as is my right as an American, which is a free country and not under anybody's dominion the last I heard tell. Anyway, Tomcat, what can I do? The deed is done. You expect me to tear it down?"

Ugly, brown drool was escaping from Tomcat's clenched lips. In spite of himself he stood, dangled his head over the railing, and spewed out the juice that had built up in his mouth.

"He's throwing up!" Dolly whispered to me.

"No, he ain't," I answered, none too sure. "But it's just as bad."

When he sat down, a string of spit dangling from his lip attached itself to his hat. He pretended not to notice. His demeanor changed completely. Gone was the trembling righteousness he had displayed earlier, and in its place was a quiet resignation.

"Then I appeal to you for another reason. My boy, Heywood, I know that he swim in your lake with your children and others. I tell him no but he is boy, like your own boy Tim. But Heywood, he is no good swimmer. Very—"

"Uncoordinated?"

"Yes, uncoordinated. I'm 'fraid he will drown."

"I'll tell my kids not to let him swim."

("Good," whispered Dolly. "I'm sick and tired of that tagalong.")

"Then he will go by himself, that is worse. I know this boy. I was boy myself."

"And you want me to tear down two weeks of solid work because you can't keep your boy in line?"

"I pay all cost."

Daddy had built the dam with stones packed with mud. He'd solidified it with a concrete he'd made mixing sand and gravel from around the farm with leftover cement he'd swapped a day's work for from a neighboring sawmill. Strictly speaking, the materials hadn't cost him a cent.

"And how do you pay me back for all the work I put in? I ain't no day laborer, Tomcat, I'm a farmer. I don't charge nothing for the use of these hands and this back but what they put into the land and what comes out of it. You don't put a price on that."

"Then I come work for you, in exchange."

For a moment Daddy's eyes blazed, and a snort escaped from his nose like locomotive steam. "No, thanks," he said politely. He spit again, landing his stream even farther off the porch. "Tell you what I will do for you, though. Next time I catch Heywood swimming on my lake, I'll take my shotgun and fill him up with birdshot. That'll teach him not to swim in dangerous water. Prob'ly save his life."

Thick-necked, round-cheeked Mr. Tomcik was stunned to stillness. His face flamed red. Then he sprang from his chair and spit his wad of tobacco onto the porch in a fine spray. He stormed off the porch to his truck, but halfway there he turned and took two steps toward my father, raising his huge arm and pointing a stubby, shaking finger at him. "*You shoot my boy—*" he screamed, "*you shoot my boy . . .*"

The threat was never completed. The English language had deserted him. From my vantage point in the living room I was momentarily alarmed, till I remembered where I had seen that face before. Many years before, my gang and I had crept up to the Tomciks' house, placed a bag of cow manure on the front porch, set fire to it, rung the doorbell, and hid behind some bushes. When Tomcat opened the door and saw the burning bag, he began stamping the fire out with his feet. We whooped with laughter and ran, knowing the nearsighted Tomcat could not identify us. He pursued us down his driveway, pointing a finger and shouting, "Hey ya, hey ya, hey ya," his face kickball-red, his eyes bulging.

Dolly and I were straining to keep from laughing now; there must have been some of our father in us. Daddy didn't hold back at all. He let go with a huge belly laugh, which only increased Tomcat's fury. Tomcat stormed to his truck, started it up, and ran it headlong into the porch. The whole house shook, and we wondered if Tomcat hadn't gone crazy. But we soon realized that in his fury he'd simply forgotten to shift into reverse. He backed up and drove away, the dent in his bumper worse than the paint scratch on the porch railing.

Daddy came in, and Thor started yowling like mad at the retreating truck. We finished supper. "Y'all don't go playing with that Heywood Tomcik no more," was all he'd say about the incident. Mother cleared the plates and then went to sweep the tobacco off the porch. That was on a Sunday.

The next Wednesday Sheriff Harbin stopped by. I don't know what he said because Daddy was working the lower garden and



the sheriff met him there. Fifteen minutes later the sheriff drove off without stopping at the house. At dinner Mother asked Daddy what the visit was for, and Daddy answered sadly, "Nothing." He nibbled on a bone for a few seconds and then added:

"I showed him around the lake. Wanted to take a look at the dam. Asked me did I threaten to shoot Heywood Tomcik." He snorted. "Can you believe it? The lies some people tell to get what they want. Y'all didn't hear me threaten Heywood, did you?"

"No," said Dolly and I in unison. Mother was silent. Daddy stopped nibbling and looked at her.

"Some folks don't know when they're being teased," he said. Then he turned to Dolly and me. "Y'all keep Heywood out of the lake. If that kid drowns, they'll think I done it."

The dam was about eight feet high and twenty feet wide, and like everything Daddy built, it was strong. During a heavy rain the lake would test its strength, straining against its foundation. It always withstood the challenge, but high water made the lake a treacherous place. Even Dolly and I, expert swimmers, were forbidden to swim the lake when the water was high. "Just keep Heywood out of it," Daddy repeated.

Easier said than done, I thought. Heywood was a natural-born tagalong. Over the next few weeks we tried every strategy we could think of to make him feel unwelcome. We'd run away, leaving him behind us in the woods, but he'd come running, screaming after us in his clumsy, pathetic way, or worse, he'd threaten to get lost and stay lost. We'd abuse him, physically and mentally, but that only made him cry. He needed us. Besides, Heywood was the only kid who agreed to steady-hindcatch in baseball. He was also a lot of fun in dodgeball because he enjoyed getting hit with the ball. So in spite of Daddy's warning he continued to run with the gang. Still, we had sense enough to keep him off the lake. At least, that is, until a sunny day in June.

Dolly and I swam nearly every sunny day, there being little else to do after chores were done, and sometimes other neighbor kids would join us. We'd row our boat to the center, overturn it, and dive from it. One afternoon I surfaced from a dive to find Heywood standing silently at the edge of the dock with his hands in his pockets. "Can I come in?" he asked forlornly.

"You know you can't, Heywood," said Dolly. "Shouldn't even be on our proppity."

"I'll give you ten cents," said Heywood. And he pulled a shiny

dime from his pocket and threw it up in his hand, trying without success to flip it with his thumb. "It's all right. I won't drown, I promise."

Heywood really wasn't a bad swimmer. It was only when he got tired that he'd forget to hold his breath and then panic when he gulped in a mouthful of water. He'd never mastered a crawl stroke, but he could dog paddle from the dock to the boat and back, which is the greatest distance he ever ventured anyway. If he ever got into real trouble, Dolly or I would come to the rescue.

"Okay," I said. "Ten cents." He placed the dime on the dock and prepared to strip down to his underwear. "Apiece."

Without hesitation, Heywood drew out another dime and laid it on top of the first. Dolly and I looked at each other and winked.

Meanwhile, the feud between the fathers had escalated. Daddy called Sheriff Harbin just for turnabout when he found two of Tomcat's escaped cows grazing our east garden. This happened often enough, and usually I was the one who led the strays back to the Tomciks'. But this time Daddy refused to return the animals until Tomcat came for them himself and apologized. This he did, with the sheriff as a witness, and when Daddy turned the cows over he said, "I'm sorry, Tomcat. It was wrong of me to go bringing the police in over a little neighborly squabble. Neighbors should be able to work things out on their own. Don't you think?" The message was received.

Thereafter, Heywood's price of admission went up to two bits. When he complained, we suggested he compare our rates with a lifeguard's at a public pool. He gave us two bits.

Sometime later, during the night, a length of barbed-wire fence between the two farms was forced down and most of our herd escaped into the Tomciks' pasture. The staples had been removed from the post, rather than the wire having been cut, in a way that a cow could have done by continual pressure on the wire (though this was hardly likely). My father didn't even bother confronting Tomcat; instead, he gathered up our herd and quietly planned his revenge.

That night at supper he said, "Noticed when I was in Tomcat's pasture that one of his cows is in calf. Looks to drop any day now."

"What concern is it of yours what happens to his herd?" said Mother, glaring. She rounded up the plates, though I wasn't finished eating, and dropped them into the sink. I'd never seen her so angry.

"What you got to be mad with Tomcat about?" said Daddy.

"I'm not mad at Tomcat!" She stormed from the kitchen and slammed the bedroom door so hard the kitchen door flew open.

Daddy looked after her, then turned to Dolly and me, and the gleam in his eye sent a shiver through my bones. He shrugged. "All I said was, he's got a pregnant cow. What's so bad about that?"

"Nothing," said Dolly and I in unison. Dolly shut the kitchen door.

Next morning when we woke, Daddy was gone and Thor was not in his pen. For a Great Dane Thor was a pretty good bird dog, and we figured that even though it was the wrong season Daddy'd taken him up to the mountains to hunt quail. Till we noticed the truck was still in the driveway.

The sun had climbed high and begun baking the land as Dolly and I headed to the lake. "You think Heywood'll come today?" Dolly said.

"No," I said. "Reckon he's run out of money. We made three dollars apiece, though. That ain't bad." I had kept the money in my pocket, figuring it was safest there from Momma's scrutiny.

"Where'd he get six dollars from anyhow?" said Dolly.

"That ain't our business. What you gonna do with yours?"

"I'd like to buy a kite, but Momma'll ask me where I got the money. So I better just hold onto it awhile."

"Yeah, me too. Just hold onto it awhile." I jingled the coins in my pocket.

Halfway to the lake we heard what sounded like someone wailing in enormous pain. We ran toward the noise, and as we rounded the bend where the lake came into view, we saw Mr. Tomcik stumbling down the hill shared by the two farms, toward the lake. He carried something in his arms that looked from that distance like a brown sack. As we approached I saw legs sticking out of it, and realized it was a tiny calf. It bleated like a train horn. Mr. Tomcik placed it on the center of the dock and scooped a hatful of water from the lake. He poured the water on the calf and started wiping it with his handkerchief. The handkerchief turned from white to dark red.

"What happened?" I said as Dolly and I reached the dock.

Mr. Tomcik didn't look up. "Your dog," he said. "When I came, he had the head in his mouth and shaking it up and down. Get some water." He threw me his hat.

Dolly and I stood frozen for a moment. The calf was still covered

with its white, sticky afterbirth. The white membrane was splotched with red, and a pool of blood was widening on the dock under the battered head. Mr. Tomcik, too, was coated with blood from the front of his shirt down.

I filled the hat with water and held it out for him to dip the handkerchief in. The water in the hat quickly darkened. Dolly remained motionless, her face turning ash-white. "Dolly," I said, "run to the house and get Momma to drive the truck down. We'll take it to the vet."

Dolly ran away. Mr. Tomcik continued wiping the blood from the wound. But I could see there was no helping the poor animal; Thor's massive jaws had nearly severed the head from the body. The bleats were weakening.

We worked in silence, earnestly, until the truck came skidding around the bend. It was Daddy who stepped out. He ran to us, his face creased with worry. "Thor done this?" he said.

Mr. Tomcik nodded without looking up.

"I'm sorry as I can be, Tomcat," said my father. "Just as sorry as I can be. Anything I can do?"

Tomcat shook his head.

"Didn't even know your cow had dropped," said Daddy.

"Must have been this morning," I said. "She didn't even have time to lick off the afterbirth."

"So I see. That's what done it. The scent of the afterbirth would drive any dog to a frenzy. Not that I'm making any excuses. It's my fault for letting Thor out of his pen. But he's a good dog.

"We talk about your dog later," said Tomcat. "Can we put the calf in your truck?"

"Course you're welcome to. But you want my advice? This one is gone. The vet'll only tell you it's got to be put to sleep. Best thing to do would be to put it out of its misery now. I got my gun in the truck, and I'd be willing to do it myself if you'd rather—"

"I got my own gun." Mr. Tomcik stood up, and looked at the calf for a moment. The bleating was fading, and the breathing was louder and more labored. He bent down and took the calf in his arms, carefully cradling the head. The dock shook under the weight of man and beast as he strode off it and up the hill to his own land. He turned back to my father and called, "I got my own gun." When he'd reached the crest of the hill, we could no longer hear the calf bleating.

Daddy stared after him as though trying to work out a puzzle.

"That man's got to learn to look on the bright side of things," he said. "At least now he's got hisself a milk cow. All that fresh milk can go to his family, 'stead of to that newborn. Watch your step, Tim. Don't want to slip on that blood." He chuckled. "That Tomcat sure has a way of leaving a mess when he comes to visit, don't he? Come on, let's go get some buckets and wash this up."

On our way back to the house we heard the crack of a rifle shot. A few cows brayed in the distance. A thousand pinpricks stabbed at my stomach. I fancied I still heard the echo of the bleating calf, but it was just a trick of my ears. I got two pails from the woodshed and went into the house for sponges, but as I returned to the truck Daddy was already backing it down the drive. "Get Dolly to help you clean the dock," he shouted out the window. And he headed up the hill, toward the back entrance to the Tomcik farm.

"We oughtta charge Mr. Tomcik for cleaning," said Dolly as we scrubbed the blood from the dock. "I hate this stuff. It stinks."

"Don't be stupid," I said. "Thor's our responsibility."

"Not mine, he's not."

"Okay, then you go tell Daddy to come do this."

A few minutes later Daddy's voice came echoing down from the hill. "Thor!" he called, and the call was answered by the moos of Tomcik's herd. A minute passed and we heard a still more distant "Thor!" and again a volley of moos. This continued as we scrubbed up the last of the blood into the pail and turned toward the house. "Thor!" he'd call, his echo receding into the hills. But we never heard Thor's excited yelp, then or thenceforward.

It was supper before Daddy came home. He sat down at the table without a word and pushed his food around his plate with his fork, staring at the salt shaker. Finally he noticed us looking at him, and he said:

"Couple of weeks back Tomcat offered to do some work for me. Reckon I'll take him up on it. Been wanting to dig a new root cellar for a long time, and I never do get around to it."

"Where do you plan to dig a root cellar?" asked Mother.

"Right in that ledge yonder." He pointed out the window where a shelf had been bulldozed into the earth when the house was built, leaving an exposed clay face which had eroded into a small hill over the years.

"That's pure red clay," said Mother. "That'll be hard digging."

"I know. But you got to have good solid foundation for a root

cellar. Don't want the darn thing caving in." He winked at me. "That Heywood ain't been around the lake, has he?"

"No," I said.

"Good. Don't want no Tomciks buried alive or otherwise on my land."

"Daddy, did you find Thor?" said Dolly.

Daddy looked down at his plate. His lip trembled. "I don't know, sweetheart," he said, picking up his fork and balancing it on his index finger. "I think maybe Thor run away. Maybe Tomcat scared him off."

"Is he dead?"

Daddy fell silent. He laid his fork down and got up and headed out the door. We heard him drive off. He didn't come back till after we were asleep.

The next three days we woke up to the sound of Tomcat's pickaxe thudding against clay. He would come before dawn each day and work till sundown. My mother offered him food and drink, but he refused, never setting foot in our house but only knocking on the kitchen door to ask permission to use the privy, even though we'd had an indoor bathroom installed. Then it was back to the bank of clay where he pitched huge clods out of an ever-deepening hole. Only rarely did we see him emerge, and then just long enough to wipe the sweat and clay from his round, beet-colored face and drink water from a jug he'd brought. He was there when Dolly and I went to the lake to swim, and he was there when we came back, the sound of the pickaxe as regular as the chime of a bell.

Even Daddy was amazed at the ferocity with which he worked, and praised his strength and stamina as he inspected the growing cellar at the end of each day. Tomcat would say nothing, but stack his pickaxe, shovel, and wheelbarrow into his truck and head for home.

On the night of the third day the sky broke open. Tomcat had packed the dirt he'd taken from the hole along the sides leading out of the entrance so as to make a pair of walls, between which ran a walkway leading down into the cellar. That night's downpour turned the walls into mud and washed half of the mud back into the hole. As often happens in that part of the country, a storm front had pushed up from the Gulf of Mexico and stalled as it bumped against the mountains of the Blue Ridge.

"Don't imagine we'll see Tomcat today," Daddy said as we sat down to breakfast. But a few minutes later there was the familiar

grattle of the old truck on the driveway. My father grinned and shook his head and soaked up some egg yolk with a piece of cornbread.

We heard a knock on the kitchen door. "Wish he'd just help hisself to the privy 'stead of all the time asking," said Mother. She opened the door. Tomcat stood there with his hat spouting rain in three different places like a leaky gutter.

"Mr. Milliken, please," he said. Mother invited him in, but he refused. Daddy sauntered to the door and bade Tomcat a hearty good morning.

"If I finish the cellar today, you will break the dam? I 'fraid it overfloats in this rain."

My father just chuckled. "No way in God's creation you can finish the cellar today. Why don't you go home, come back tomorrow?"

"I finish it today."

"Don't make no sense, anyhow, to break the dam when the lake's this high, prob'ly flood right onto your land. Best to do it when it's low."

Tomcat weighed this for a moment, then turned away. A few minutes later we heard the steady scratch of his shovel in the mud.

We stayed in the house all day, trying to keep out of Mother's hair. Daddy mostly sat in his easy chair staring out the window at the hole, scratching his chin, his face creased into wrinkles as though he were working out a puzzle. The rain showed no sign of slacking.

He was as still as a corpse in the chair, but for the scratching and the occasional pull from the tobacco plug. At one point he cocked himself upright like a dog on a scent. I snuck to the bedroom so I could see what he saw. Mr. Tomcik was coming out of the hole, and he sank onto the mound of mud and dropped his arms onto his knees and his head on his arms. Mr. Tomcik was the color of the clay from head to foot.

Daddy went out the kitchen door, and I cracked the window so I could hear what he said. Tomcat saw him coming and made an effort to wipe the mud from his face. In the cacophony of rain on the roof I could not make out my father's words as he squatted beside Tomcat and explained something to him. But I heard Tomcat when he stood up and bellowed, "You promised!" And I saw how quickly the blood filled his face and eyes.

"I never did," said my father. "I said if you came and worked for me I'd think about it."



"You promised," said Tomcat, and then the blood left his face and it turned white as lamb's wool.

I didn't hear what Daddy said next or what Tomcat replied. He gathered up his tools and slammed them into his truck and drove away, sliding to and fro in the mud of the drive. I ran to the kitchen as Daddy was entering. He took a towel from the stove where Mother was cooking and wiped his head dry as he said, "That man's command of the English language could stand improvement. Fool claims I promised I'd tear the dam down." He shook his head. "Hell, I'd best get down there and see if it's flooding. Wait dinner on me."

Dinner waited as he went to check the dam. When he got back, he dried off and changed clothes and we sat down. "Dam's okay," he said. "It's high, but I seen a break in the clouds out of the west. Rain's about over."

He was right. The birds came chirping out before we'd cleared the table. Daddy's mood had changed with the weather. "Oughtta be some good fishing about now. Why don't we go on down the lake, Timmy? Get the poles out of the shed. Them cats'll be biting at anything that moves after that rain."

I got the poles from the shed, and we started down the road. We hadn't left sight of the house when we saw Heywood Tomcik running toward us around a bend in the road. Stumbling, more like. Between gasps of air he was making highpitched noises like the scream of a teapot. He was drenched from head to foot.

"What in the hell—" said Daddy between clenched lips. Then out loud: "What's up, Heywood!"

Heywood's face was red, like his father's had been the day the feud started. As he drew near, I saw the terror in his eyes, and my stomach knotted up. He noticed us for the first time, and he stopped and bent over with his hands on his knees to catch his breath. "My father—" he said. "Mom sent me looking for him—I found him—"

"That's nice," said Daddy.

*"Under the dam!"*

He fell forward, collapsing into my father's arms. Daddy gave him to me to hold and said, "Wait here, I'll get the truck." I was left holding wet little Heywood in my arms and trying to calm him down.

"What do you mean, under the dam?" I asked. Heywood's answer was incomprehensible as he tried to catch his breath and speak between big, racking sobs.

We hopped on the bed of the truck and sped down the muddy

road. "I was afraid to go down there," Heywood cried.

"Down where?"

"Under the dam." We reached the lake. The dam was on the far side. The first thing you saw, approaching it, was the hole in the top of it where the lake was roaring through, as though an eight-foot bite had been taken out of the dam. The mud-swollen water swirled and bubbled into the hole like bathwater down a drain.

We rushed to the edge of the dam, and leaned over till we could see the bottom. Daddy quickly pushed me away, but not before I saw it. The brown water was roaring down from the wall and filling up the gully that had been left dry when the lake was built. It was swallowing up Mr. Tomcik, who lay face down just below the dam. His legs had been pinned beneath a concrete slab that had broken off, and his arms were spread out at his sides. I couldn't see any blood but I knew he was dead, even before Daddy scrambled down to free him from the slab.

"You boys run back to the house and tell—never mind." He was holding Mr. Tomcik's wrist. His voice became low and calming. "Tim, just walk Heywood to his house and tell his mamma what's happened. Have her call Sheriff Harbin. You all got a phone, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Heywood between sobs.

"But Daddy, shouldn't we—"

"Go on, now, boy. Get him away from here."

So I had to climb the hill with Heywood, and pass through the fence that bounded our lands, and lead him around the mud puddles in the Tomciks' upper pasture. As I walked, I could hear Heywood's coins jingling in my pocket. With each step they got louder and louder. I tried putting my hand in my pocket to keep them from banging around, but feeling their cold, shiny hardness only made it worse. Heywood's clothes were still soaking wet, and his shoes squished as he walked.

We came to the back of the house, and Heywood stopped. He looked at the kitchen window and rubbed a tear from his cheek with his fist. "I'll go in myself," he said. "You head on back."

I shrugged. "Okay. I'll wait here if you want."

"No, that's all right. You go back."

He turned toward the house and I saw the way his wet clothes clung to his frail body, and I felt a mighty wave of selfishness that I set myself up so much higher than him. I knew I had to do something.

"Heywood," I said.

He turned back. I reached into my pocket and turned it inside out, letting the dimes and quarters spill out into my hands. A few of them fell into the muddy grass. "Here," I said. "These are yours."

He stood there looking at me, like I might be playing a trick on him. I waited till he came to me and took the coins and stuffed them into his pocket. At that moment I looked up to the kitchen window and saw his mother standing there watching us. Heywood turned and saw her, too, then ran up the stairs toward her, stumbling over the top step. I walked away, and the only other thing I heard was the screen door slamming.

Sheriff Harbin came quick, and without using his siren. "This how you found him, Mr. Milliken?" he asked, lifting the dead man's wrist.

"No, the water was flooding over the body, so I lifted the rock and drug him up on the bank." The water had levelled out again behind what was left of the dam, and the only flow from it was through the culvert on the side. But the banks of the gully were muddy from the flood and you could see where huge chunks of earth had been dislodged and sent downstream.

The sheriff nodded. "There's been a strain on the dam and I don't like the looks of it now. Let's pull him up farther." They grabbed hold of him and pulled him to the top of the dam. Mr. Tomcik's face was white as the concrete and had a dent in it just above the right eye. The skin there was purple and black, but any blood had been washed away by the stream. It made me think of how red his face had been when we left the manure bag on his doorstep, and how he'd come running after us calling, "Hey ya, hey ya, hey ya," his eyes bulging because he couldn't see us.

Daddy sat down between me and the body. I thought he was going to take out a plug of tobacco, but he didn't. The sheriff walked to the top of the dam and took a few tentative steps across it. The late sun had come out of the clouds, but was now down below the hill. The sheriff came back and glanced around, then sat down between me and Daddy.

"What do you suppose happened here?" he said. I knew he wasn't talking to me.

"You know how he hated that dam," said Daddy. "Reckon he come here to tear it down, then lost his footing when the water started crashing in. Damn fool thing to do."

"Yeah. I thought of that. Only one problem with it, though."

Daddy's face turned to stone. "Wondered if you'd notice."

The sheriff nodded, and both men sat silently gazing at the dam. "What problem?" I cried.

Sheriff Harbin turned to me like it was the first time he'd seen me. "Son, we need somebody to stand up at the road and tell the ambulance how to get down here. Will you do that for me?"

"Tim's momma don't even know anything's happened yet. 'Less she heard you drive up. Go break the news to her and Dolly, Tim. She'll want to go comfort the widow."

"All right." That seemed to be all I was good for. I left the three men in a row: Daddy and the sheriff staring at the dam, Tomcat staring at the sky.

Just before I rounded the bend that led up to the house, I saw something glinting in the woods to the left. I wouldn't have paid it any mind, but I'd been puzzling over what the sheriff had called the "problem" with Daddy's theory. That put me on the lookout for anything unusual. So I left the road and took a few steps into the woods to get a better look.

There lying on the ground was a pickaxe. I went to pick it up, to take it back up to the toolshed, but I saw right away that it wasn't ours. It looked familiar, though. Then I knew.

It was Tomcat's pickaxe, the one he'd used to dig our root cellar. How had it gotten there? The last I'd seen of it was when he'd loaded it onto his truck and gone off in anger. He must have brought it back when—

So that was it. That was the "problem" with Daddy's theory. If Mr. Tomcik had come to tear down our dam, he'd done it with his bare hands. Unless somebody afterward had taken the pickaxe and—

My heart beat hard. I had thought myself into a corner. Only two people besides Mr. Tomcik had been to the lake that afternoon, Heywood and my father, and I didn't see how scrawny Heywood could have hit his father with the axe or pushed him off the dam. My father could have, though. Easy.

Best thing I could have done was drop the pickaxe and pretend I'd never seen it. I thought about taking it along to the house; putting it in the toolshed like it was our own, but then the Tomciks might identify it or I might be seen with it along the way. So I did the most fool thing I'd ever done in my life.

I lifted the pickaxe. It was heavy in my hands. One side was wet

where it had lain against the earth, but the other was fairly dry. I could see no blood on it. I started digging the ground with it.

When I'd made a sizable hole, I threw the pickaxe in and covered it with the loose dirt. I tamped the dirt with an old log, and laid the log across the spot. Then I wiped my hands on some grass and ran to tell Momma about Tomcat.

The four of us went to the police station that night; Daddy did not come back. I told my story to a man with a tape recorder. Momma told what she knew. Dolly just went along for the ride.

Momma offered to call a lawyer, but Daddy refused. Instead Momma called the pastor, who mobilized the neighbors. When we left the station, we saw Mrs. Tomcik coming in from the parking lot, dragging Heywood by the hand. We didn't speak.

Most of our small congregation was waiting for us on the porch. Momma let the pastor say a quick prayer, then sent them all to Mrs. Tomcik's.

Down by the lake bright lights were shining, you could see them from the house, and occasionally you'd hear one man calling to another. I don't know what time it was when the state police cars came up from the lake and headed down the highway, but I was still wide awake, thinking about that pickaxe. And Daddy had still not come home.

I got up because I knew I wasn't going to sleep any more. I think I had in mind to walk down to the lake, but I'm not sure. I slipped into my clothes and shoes and tiptoed down the hall and into the living room.

Momma was sitting in the easy chair in the dark, staring out the window toward the root cellar. She was hunched down with her elbows resting on her knees. She had a cigarette in her hands, something I'd never seen before. She was staring so hard out the window that she hadn't heard me come in. I'd just about made up my mind to tiptoe past her and out the door when she looked up at me as if I was a stranger.

"What are you doing up? Get back to bed," she said.

I had never felt sorry for my mother before. It was the first time I saw her as someone who had worries of which I wasn't a part. The way she stared out the window, her face all drawn and looking old—it made me want to do something to help. But I didn't know what to do, so I went back to bed.

\* \* \*

Daddy came home the next day, triumphant. They didn't have enough evidence to hold him. Even when they dug up the pickaxe the next day: his prints weren't on it. It couldn't be determined whether Tomcat's skull had been smashed by the pickaxe, or by the rocks at the bottom of the gully. But the fact that it had been buried was enough to get a cause of "murder by person or persons unknown" at the inquest, instead of accident. And that made all the difference.

Things were never the same between Momma and Daddy. They never discussed the incident, which proves that Momma thought Daddy had done it. And Dolly and I couldn't help but be influenced by her. I tried many times to tell Daddy what I knew and what I'd done. I figured he probably knew anyway: if he'd flung the pickaxe into the woods, who else would have buried it? But there was an unspoken law that the subject would never be mentioned. He just bore it all in silence and tried to retain some normality in his life.

Six years later Momma caught cancer and died, Daddy nursing her patiently all the while. The next year he followed her to the grave. By sheer coincidence, their plot was right next to Mr. Tomcik's in the church cemetery. Everyone found that a great irony, for it seemed they all knew what had really happened at the lake that day. Everyone believed that Daddy killed Tomcat. I believed it, too.

Until yesterday.

Yesterday I was mowing the lawn of my suburban Atlanta home when a red Maserati pulled into my driveway and a short, powerfully-built man about my own age got out. I took him for a realtor; they are always trying to get Jen and me to sell. The man wore sunglasses, and there was something vaguely familiar about the way he walked up to me—a cockiness he used to gloss over his shuffling awkwardness. "Tim Milliken?" he shouted when he was ten yards away.

I shut off the mower. "That's me." I eyed him suspiciously. He took off the sunglasses and immediately I recognized him: Heywood; he had his father's drooping eyes.

"Come up to the porch, Heywood."

"Call me Woody, please."

"I'm not sure I can, but I'll try." He followed me to the porch, and we sat down on patio chairs. Jen was back in her studio painting, and I didn't want the two of them to meet.

Heywood sat on the edge of his chair, as though he didn't really want to touch it. "Hot day, isn't it?" he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead. I nodded.

"I owe you and your sister six dollars," he said, pulling a folded check from his shirt pocket. "At compounded interest over forty years, I figure that comes to about a hundred. Here."

He handed me the check and I stared at it for about a minute. The handwriting was bold but shaky. It was signed "Woody Thomson." I put the check in my pocket and stared at Heywood until he started talking.

"Your father didn't kill my father."

"How do you know?"

"I was there."

I stared at him again, waiting. A car came down the road. He waited for it to pass before he continued.

"You remember how I wasn't allowed to swim in your lake?" I nodded. "I used to go anyway, when I knew you wouldn't be there. It had been raining hard that day, and the rain had just stopped and the lake was all muddy, and I knew I'd have it to myself. It was important to me. I had to prove I could do it. One day I was going to shock all of you by being such a good swimmer that you'd have to let me in, money or no money. So I was practicing that day. I guess my father had the same idea—that he'd have the lake to himself."

Heywood's eyes turned down into his hands. He seemed as small as ever, even though he'd clearly put on a lot of muscle since I'd seen him last. But that kind of person is never going to look big, no matter how much they grow. There's a smallness in their eyes that hangs with them for life. "My father wanted to break that dam, and he knew your father wouldn't be around to stop him. I didn't notice him till I heard his pickaxe taking chunks out of the wall. I was in the dead center of the lake, dog paddling like hell, but he didn't see me because he was so nearsighted. He was standing up on the center of the dam, busting up the concrete. I decided I'd better get out or I'd catch hell from him, so I started quietly swimming toward the opposite bank, but then something funny happened. I got caught by a ferocious current.

"What happened was that my father had broken through the top level of the dam, and the lake water was pouring over it, which set up a current tugging everything downstream. Fool that I was, I tried swimming directly into the current, because I just wanted



to be as far away from my father as I could, and so of course I quickly tired out. Even then I didn't yell out. I was that scared of him, and I didn't realize the danger. When it was obvious I was going to go over the dam if I didn't do something, I screamed. And immediately gulped a mouthful of water.

"He saw me and stopped. He'd loosened another large chunk of the dam. He knew just what to do. He held the pickaxe for me to grab onto. But it was clear I was going to be too far out in the center of the flow to reach it, so he stepped onto the section of the dam that he'd just loosened, and bent way into the middle. I got hold of the pickaxe, and he tried to pull me in, but I slammed against the loose part of the dam and the whole thing collapsed. My father went right over and some of the concrete came down on top of him.

"I was left holding the pickaxe. I used it to get a hold on the dam and by that I shimmied my way over to the shore. I was exhausted, panicky, and anyway I was just a stupid kid. I was afraid to go down there, but I don't know which I was afraid of more—to find him dead or to find him alive. All I could think of was that he would blame me for it.

"I ran toward your house to get help. Suddenly I realized I still had the pickaxe in my hand. I threw it in the woods. I must have thought in the back of my mind that it would get my father into trouble if people knew he was trying to destroy your father's dam. I was utterly exhausted and not thinking straight. The rest of the story you know."

Heywood squinted. His whole face contorted in pain. He was trying to hold back tears, almost succeeding. "Except one thing," he added. "If they had ever charged your pa, I'd have told them everything. As it happened, I just didn't see any point in confessing. I was just a kid anyway, and by the time I was grown enough to know better, both your parents were dead." He put his hands over his eyes and rubbed them. "I mean, if *he* didn't want to tell the story, why should *I*?"

"What do you mean, if *he* didn't want to tell?"

"Your father knew I was there. He came down earlier and saw me."

"What? Are you sure?"

"Yeah. He waved at me. He knew I came down when it rained. He'd seen me before. He didn't care if I drowned or not, as long as you and Dolly weren't involved. It was a secret we had."

"Then why didn't he say—"

"I don't know. Actually, I was hoping maybe you could think of a reason."

I was dumbfounded. It boggled my mind that my father would have kept quiet to save Heywood from a whipping when his own life was at stake. Maybe if he had been charged with the murder, he would have broken his silence—except that he *had* been charged, by Mother and everyone else who talked of it. And by me.

"Maybe he was just so stubborn . . ." I mumbled.

"What?"

Maybe he'd just refused to defend himself. Hoped that his character would speak for him. When it didn't, or when we were unable to listen, how humiliated he must have been. But that only made his pride dig in harder. "Nothing."

Heywood wiped his forehead again. "Could I trouble you for a glass of water?"

I weighed inviting him inside, having him meet Jen. But that would be too much for one day. I'd never told Jen about Tomcat's death, and I swore I never would. Anyway, Heywood's address was on his check if I ever changed my mind. "Wait here."

I went into the kitchen and poured a glass of ice water. Jen came in, her face splattered with paint. "Who's that you're talking to on the porch?" she said.

"Somebody else wants to buy the house."

She chuckled. "How much?"

"A hundred," I said, grinning privately.

"When will they ever learn?"

I took Heywood his water, and he gulped it down, wiped his mouth, and stood up. "I'll be going now," he said. "Just wanted to drop off that check."

"You could have sent it."

"I didn't, did I?" We stood facing each other a moment. He did not raise his hand to shake mine, nor did I. "Anyway, I wanted to make sure you were the right Tim Milliken." He walked to his Maserati and drove away, and I went back to my lawn mower.

That was yesterday. Today, I went to church for the first time in many years, and did some long, hard praying. And tomorrow—

Tomorrow I might just cash that check of Heywood's. I'll think about it.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



*Photo by Algimantas Kezys*

An underworld character, evidently a hit man. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10168-0035. Please label your entry "September Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 155.

FICTION

# An Excuse for Shooting Earl

by Joseph Hansen

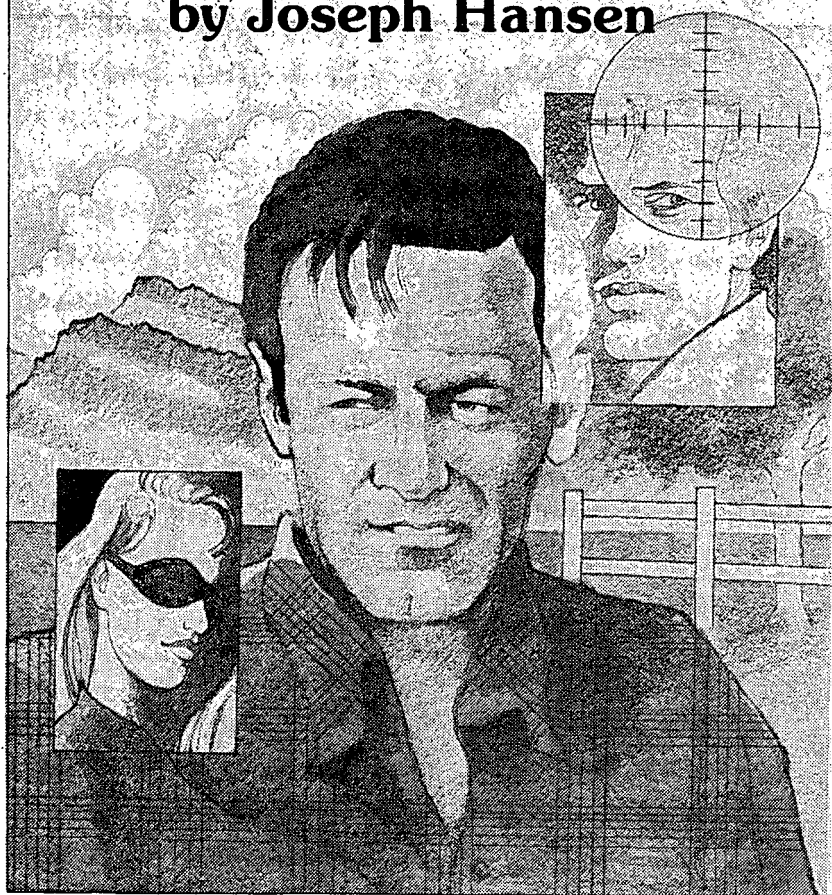


Illustration by George Thompson

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**R**ivera was up at the seminary on the ridge, a full-fledged priest now, secretary to the monsignor, and not always free to help out Bohannon. Old George Stubbs was suffering in his joints from the dampness of the winter as he commonly did. At Bohannon's insistence, he lay in bed in his whitewashed plank room at the end of the long stable building, alternately dozing and cussing the pain.

So when the day's last two riders came through the gate at sundown, the job of unsaddling Seashell and Geranium, watering them, rubbing their coats down, cleaning their hoofs—this work fell to Bohannon. It had been a long day. He wanted to put his feet up and have a drink. He closed the half door of Geranium's stall, went along past the other stalls saying goodnight to the other horses, some his own, some just boarding there, and stepped out of the stable into dying daylight.

He was making wearily for the ranch house when a young man he hadn't seen before stepped in front of him. Bohannon looked past him. He'd arrived in a new car—a Sterling, so new it still had a paper license plate. He was smartly dressed—meaning everything he wore had enough cloth in it

to suit up two of him. He was thin—maybe even gaunt. How old? Hard to say. Less than thirty.

He said, "Mr. Bohannon? Can I talk to you?"

Bohannon said, "I was about to have a drink. Come inside and join me." Bohannon led the way into the big, plank-walled kitchen where shadows had taken over. He sat the boy at the kitchen table, brought whisky and glasses with ice in them to the table, and sat down himself. A lamp stood in the middle of the table, but he didn't switch it on. He liked sitting there in the twilight, found it restful. "What's on your mind?" He expected, with a car like that, the kid might have money enough to own a horse and wanted Bohannon to board it for him. But that wasn't it.

"You're the only private investigator in this area."

But what was he doing in this area? The frame on the Sterling's license plate named a Fresno dealer. Not exactly next door. And Fresno was a good-sized town, bound to have a P.I., more than one. Bohannon only said, "That's right."

"Do you find people?" The boy had a coughing spell then. It racked him. And it sounded awful. He sipped some whisky, grimaced, pushed the glass

away. But he stopped coughing and used a handkerchief to wipe his mouth and dry his eyes. "I mean—that's one of the things private detectives do, isn't it?"

"If they can." Bohannon lit a cigarette, watching the kid. "You understand, I only do investigations on the side, part-time. These stables keep me pretty busy."

"Oh, hell. You mean you won't help me?"

"I don't know," Bohannon said. "Who's missing?"

"A man called Earl Cartmell. Do you know who he is?"

"I used to know his father," Bohannon said. "You want to tell me your name?"

"My name isn't important." He put out a hand, and Bohannon shook it. It hadn't much life to it. No strength. "Uh—Taylor, uh—Cliff Taylor."

"What do you want with Earl Cartmell? How long has he been missing?"

"That's not important, either. I just want you to find him." The boy drew a wallet from those blowsy trousers of his, took money from it, and spread the money on the table. "Here's a thousand dollars." His eyes, large in his wasted face, pleaded. "Like a retainer, right? I'll give you another thousand when you locate him."

"Is it your money?" Bohannon asked.

"What do you mean?" Taylor yelped. "Of course it's my money. And, oh, yes, make a—an expense sheet. I'll pay all expenses." He was reciting from instructions, wasn't he? He ticked the details off on his fingers. "Airline tickets. Hotels. Meals. Car rentals. Earl Cartmell is a gambler. That'll probably mean looking in Laughlin, Las Vegas, Reno. Gardena—the poker parlors. Santa Anita—the racetrack."

"Suppose I find him and he doesn't want to come back with me?" Bohannon said. "I can't force him. Not unless you give me a reason. Did he commit a crime? Is there a warrant out for him? If so, you want the sheriff, not me."

"You don't have to bring him back. You don't even have to speak to him. Just phone me up and tell me where he is. I'll give you a number to call." When Bohannon said nothing to this, Taylor cracked open the wallet again. "Look—how about three thousand dollars?"

"Keep your money," Bohannon said.

Taylor looked ready to weep. "You won't do it?"

"I'm short-handed here. One sick old man, one part-time helper. I can't travel, I can't leave the place that long."



"But you have to!" Taylor shouted in despair.

Bohannon smiled a little, "Oh, I guess not. Look—" he swept up the money like loose playing cards, tamped its edges, handed it back "—Earl Cartmell's not worth the trouble. Anyway, if he's gambling, he'll lose. He always does. Then he'll come home. You know the Cartmell ranch? That's where you'll find him."

The kid sat with the packet of bills in his hand, a hand so thin and the skin so transparent blue veins showed. His head hung. Bohannon wondered if he was crying. But he was dry-eyed when he looked up. Still, he didn't say anything.

Bohannon asked, "What do you need with Earl Cartmell? What does anybody need with him?"

The boy drew breath to speak but didn't speak. He was sweating as if he'd run a long way, and when he stood up it was as if his legs were too tired to bear him. He put the money back into the wallet, put the wallet away, and moved toward the door. Bohannon followed and pushed open the screen for him to go out. He took a few slow steps along the roofed plank walkway, then turned back.

"I heard you were a kind man," he said, reproachfully.

"Always helping people."

"They trust me," Bohannon said. "You don't trust me."

"I'll pay you name. How much? You name it."

Bohannon said gently, "Just tell me what it's all about." The boy only looked at him bleakly. Bohannon said, "Or don't you know? That's it, isn't it? You don't know."

Without a word, Cliff Taylor, or whatever his name was, turned and went off through the twilight. To do what—search for Earl Cartmell himself? He looked too sick.

**B**ohannon had almost forgotten him when Earl's name came up again. Bohannon had got three giggly and slightly scared college girls safely aboard Ruby, Buck, and Twilight and sent them on the dependable old mounts out the gate and up the canyon road. He was trudging back to the kitchen to catch up on his book-keeping when he heard a car turn in at the gate and checked his stride. The faded yellow pickup truck he saw used to roll in here every week or two. And he'd felt good when he saw it. But that was past. Hubert Cartmell was dead. And this could only be that empty-headed high school girl he'd married when he was old



enough to know better. After that, Cartmell had stopped coming around for rides in the canyons, card games, companionable talk over drinks. And Bohannon had seen him again only in his dying days, when Cartmell sent for him.

The yellow truck halted beside Bohannon's green one, the door opened, and as he'd feared, a young woman got out of it. It surprised him mildly that she wore jeans, a plaid shirt, boots, like a working rancher. The little he knew of her, she'd preferred flounces. Nobody thought much of her, but they'd never said anything against her looks, that trim figure, the hair that glinted gold and fell to her shoulders. She might be a TV star in Western duds, Bohannon thought. Maybe the dark glasses made him think that.

"Mr. Bohannon?" She held out a hand.

He shook the hand. "Mrs. Cartmell?"

"Ruthann, please." She looked around at the green-trimmed white buildings, the towering eucalyptus trees, the flowerbeds, the rail-fenced corral and the oval of hardpan where children of all ages learned to ride, jump, barrel race. They were learning now—Rivera was leading four little ones slowly around and

around. He wasn't in black suit and turned collar: the newly-minted priest was a cowboy for the day—flannel shirt, Levi's, boots. Ruthann Cartmell asked, "Are you busy? I need a minute of your time."

Bohannon said, "I was just going inside for a coffee break. Why don't you join me?"

She came along, limping a little, silent, preoccupied. She didn't take off the dark glasses when Bohannon opened the screen door and ushered her into the big, plank-walled kitchen. She kept them on when he held a chair for her at the round table, poured coffee from the tall, white-specked blue enamel pot, brought mugs of coffee to the table, and sat down opposite her.

She said, "Hubert told me if ever I was in trouble to come to you. He said you were the finest man he'd ever known. The straightest. And the wisest."

"He was a good friend." Bohannon lit a cigarette. "I'm sorry he's gone."

She laughed ruefully. "Not as sorry as I am."

"Something wrong at the ranch?"

"There's no income," she said. "When Hubert got so sick, he sold off the cattle to pay the medical bills."

Hubert had been fifty when he married her. Then in only

six or seven years had come cancer, the fast-acting kind. It was shocking to see the big, robust rancher, with his long stride, loud laughing voice, his youthful eagerness for living every day to the hilt, reduced in a few miserable months to a skeletal, sunken-eyed wreck, scarcely able to whisper.

"I don't know how I'm going to hang onto the place." She sipped some coffee, reached across for Bohannon's cigarettes and took one from the pack. He lit it for her. "And I have to. I can't let it go, Mr. Bohannon. I gave Hubie my solemn word."

Bohannon winced at the nickname, but he kept quiet.

She went on, "It's the Cartmell ranch. He put his whole life into it. It's his monument."

Bohannon said, "What about a bank loan?"

She laughed bleakly. "Those silver-haired old dudes put a fatherly (I don't think) hand on my knee and croon that cattle'll only ruin me. On what I'd earn from beef, I could barely pay my running expenses. I could never repay a loan, not one big enough to get the ranch back to what it was."

"So what do they advise?"

She shrugged and blew smoke away. "That I let them put the land up for sale. To real estate developers. The Central

Coast is the coming place. Everybody wants to live here. I'll be rich." Her laugh was sad. "Where? Why?"

"Didn't Hubert own stocks, bonds, shares?"

"Not a whole lot. Earl sold his half right off, of course. And gambled the money away."

Earl was Hubert's son by his first marriage. Hubert had been so proud to have a big, strapping son like himself that he'd let the boy run wild. Earl had inherited only his father's size and strength—he'd missed out when it came to character.

"From my half, dividends keep food on the table, gas in the truck, and a few horses in the barn."

Bohannon said, "Life's no good without horses."

"Hubie taught me that. But now I'm faced with taxes."

"So . . . what will you do? Sell the stocks?"

She said miserably, "That's all I can do. Unless—"

Bohannon swallowed coffee and watched her with his eyebrows raised.

She took a breath and blurted, "There's a man, Jeremy Essex. He's in the music business. Promotion. He wants the ranch for a weeklong summer rock festival. Like—" she wrinkled her brow—"what did they call it?"

"Woodstock?"

"That's the one. Years ago."

Bohannon smiled because he couldn't help it. "Ancient history." He wondered to himself how old she was by now. Thirty? Not quite. "A Woodstock by the sea?" he said.

"Jeremy wants it halfway between L.A. and San Francisco. Monterey County won't hear of it, but our Board of Supervisors doesn't seem to mind. And the Cartmell ranch would be perfect, he says. A natural what-chacallit —amphitheater— to set up the stage in, the lights, the sound system, all the space in the world for parking. Plenty of motel rooms and restaurants in the area." She put out her cigarette. "He'd pay me ten percent of the take. And the take would be millions."

Bohannon noted that she used the promoter's first name. Young and goodlooking, wasn't he? "You believe him?"

"Should I? You tell me." She took a card from her shirt pocket and held it out.

"Looks impressive," he said. "But I'd check up on him if I were you."

"Will you do it for me?" she said. "For Hubie?"

"All right." He nodded, put the card into his wallet, sat down. "What if it doesn't draw—nobody comes?"

"He can get Bruce Springsteen," she said, "the Grateful

Dead, Morrissey, a whole list of stars. People will come."

He tilted his head, studying her. "So why are you here? You already know you're going to do it."

"Earl's dead set against it," she said. "He wants to sell the ranch for housing tracts."

Bohannon drank. "And neither one of you can sell it unless the other one agrees?"

"Mr. Fitzmaurice says it's a terrible will," she said. "He tried to get Hubie to set up trust funds for each of us till we're older. No way. I got half, Earl got half, and that's that." She repeated her bitter little laugh. "On his deathbed, he made Earl swear to stop gambling and whoring around, patch things up with Trish, go back to his kids. 'Course Earl promised. But what's that worth?"

"You can still keep him from selling off the place."

"And he'll do his damndest to stop the rock festival."

Bohannon scratched an ear. "Maybe he's right. There was only one Woodstock. This would be a one-time thing."

"But if the money is as much as Jeremy—Mr. Essex—says, I could buy livestock again, hire hands, start the ranch over. I wouldn't need another rock festival."

Bohannon worried. "Times

change. In the sixties the kids wanted to sleep naked in muddy fields, wanted to hear the music in the pouring rain, wanted to be little children forever. They're not like that any more."

"They still go to rock concerts," she said. "I did until I married Hubie. My whole crowd did."

"I'll check out Essex, see if he's real." He reached quickly across and lifted the dark glasses from her face.

She grabbed for them. "What are you doing?"

"That's quite a shiner. Who gave it to you?"

"It was an accident," she said.

"You came for help," he said. "Let me help."

She sighed glumly. "You know Earl." She put the glasses on again. "He's not too bright. When it comes to a difference of opinion, his fists are his only argument." She stood up. "I have to go. Thanks for your help."

Bohannon stood up, too. "You'd better not go back there alone. I'll trail along and straighten him out."

"This happened three days ago. He packed up and stormed off. He had a bundle of money. God knows where he got it. But he won't come home till it's gone."

"Home from where?"

"He didn't confide in me. Why?"

"Two nights back, someone came asking me to find him."

"Probably somebody he owed money to," Ruthann said.

"A skinny kid in expensive clothes, driving a brand-new high-priced car. From Fresno. He claimed his name was Cliff Taylor. Mean anything to you?"

"Earl never talks about his friends." She smiled and laid a hand on Bohannon's arm. "I'll be all right." She headed for the door. He followed her along the covered plank walk that fronted the ranch house. She limped past flowerbeds. "Hubie's guns are still racked up there in his den. And he taught me how to use them." She opened the pickup's cab and climbed aboard. "It would be nice to have an excuse for shooting Earl." She slammed the door, started the engine, and smiled down at Bohannon. "Now wouldn't it?"

**I**t was still dark when Bohannon went out to the stables to do the morning chores. By the time he'd finished, the sun had topped the eastern ridge, and dew sparkled on everything—roof-tops, pickup and stake trucks, horse trailers, fence rails,

stretches of mowed grass. He showered, shaved, and dressed. And when he walked into the kitchen, carrying his best boots, stocky old Stubbs was at the cookstove fixing breakfast. The smells in the air were good ones of coffee, bacon, cornmeal mush frying in butter. Bohannon sat down at the table and pulled on the boots.

"You're supposed to be in bed," he said.

"So you can have women running in and out of here at all hours?" Stubbs poured coffee and brought a mug to the table for Bohannon. "What would Father say?" He meant Rivera, who was half Bohannon's age and a quarter Stubbs's.

"She's a client," Bohannon said. "Strictly business."

"Hah," Stubbs said. "That pom-pom girl Hubert Cartmell went crazy over, wasn't she?" He hobbled back to the stove. "Any reason you couldn't go crazy, too?"

"I'm not old enough," Bohannon said.

"You're getting there." Stubbs laid the fried bacon on a brown paper grocery sack to drain and set out golden brown slices of fried mush next to them. Now he cracked eggs into the bacon grease. "What are you all dressed up about? Who'd you swipe the suit and tie from?"

"They've been in my closet." Bohannon tried the coffee. Too hot. "Can't you smell the mothballs?"

"She's sending you to the wicked city, ain't she?"

"Hollywood," Bohannon said. "The music business."

"I figured as much." Stubbs hovered over the eggs. The hand that held the spatula was warped, the joints swollen. But he managed, and he was touchy about offers of help. "Talk is there's gonna be a big rock and roll thing at the Cartmell ranch, end of August."

Bohannon was surprised. "Talk is—where?"

"At the drugstore." Stubbs laid the eggs neatly on plates, sunny side up. "Seems to me I'm always in there. Pills. Capsules. Rubs. Haven't found one yet that works." He put bacon and mush on the plates and brought them to the table. "To hear the ads on the radio—" he sat down with a grunt of discomfort and tucked a napkin in the neck of his shirt—"you'd think every one of them had discovered the final cure for pain at last."

"Nobody wants the final cure." Bohannon poured a lick of maple syrup on the crusty chunks of mush and picked up his fork. "Who at the drugstore, George?"

"Gawky kid that works

there," Stubbs said. "Hair done up all spiky. He's all on fire about it. Rattled off a lot a names, singers and bands I never heard of. Outlandish."

Bohannon spotted Sharon Webb lined up with other earlybirds outside the bank, waiting for it to open. He liked Sharon Webb, a staunch, pug-nosed little widow, the local watchdog for the save-the-earth types, of whom there were a good many in Madrone and Settlers Cove. Retired people, mostly, keen on country living, wanting the landscape and the wildlife left as it was. They were in friendly territory. There was a seabird sanctuary not far from Morro Bay. And the Fish and Wildlife Service kept an eye out for the safety of the sea otters along this rugged coastline.

He asked her, "Have you heard about a summer rock festival at the Cartmell ranch?"

She snorted.

"Earl Cartmell came to alert me soon as that nitwit step-mother of his told him. Next thing, I hear it from Celia Van Slyke, all smiles."

"Figures," Bohannon said. "She owns a motel."

"And there's twenty more like her," Sharon Webb grumbled. "And fifty Sloppy Joes, with a license to poison people

with fat, cholesterol, whisky, and gin."

"It's not a done thing," Bohannon said.

"No, and if I've got anything to say about it, it never will be. You know why I cried at Hubert's funeral? Because I could see this kind of thing coming. That trashy little—"

"She's all right," Bohannon said. "She's just trying to save the ranch."

"Save it, my foot. They'll chop up his oaks for firewood, scatter trash ten feet deep, pollute the creeks. Hack, think of the environmental impact. Otto Tylson and I are taking a delegation over to San Luis for the next supervisor's meeting, and if they won't listen, we'll go to the Coastal Commission in Sacramento. We'll get up a—"

He didn't hear what she and Otto, a wealthy real estate agent, were going to get up. The bank doors clattered open, and everybody hurried inside. Including Bohannon, who had a week's checks to deposit and, mournfully, a cashier's check to buy for the mental home over the mountains where they looked after his wife Linda, who had retreated again into silent withdrawal from life. As to putting anything into savings—he wasn't managing that these days. Owning horses and paying for their board was a

luxury some people were finding lately they couldn't afford. Business was falling off. Two years ago he'd have been able to lend Ruthann Cartmell the money to pay her taxes. This year, he'd be lucky to pay his own. He sealed the hospital check in an envelope already addressed and stamped, crossed the sleepy street to the little post office, poked the envelope through a slot, then got into the green pickup and headed south on Highway 1. He had nothing to lend Hubert Cartmell's widow, but maybe he could at least keep her from being swindled.

“**W**hat I'm sorry about,” he told Rivera that afternoon as he helped him muck out the stalls, “is that I didn't get to see Jeremy Essex. He was out of town.”

Rivera shoveled wet straw and manure into a wheelbarrow.

“But the people you did see—recording executives, musicians, journalists—they assured you he is what he claims to be? He is not lying to Señora Cartmell?”

“He's not lying.” With a grunt, Bohannon heaved up on the handles of the wheelbarrow and got it rolling along the pas-

sageway between the stalls. The wheel jarred over the planks. “He's put on some of the biggest concerts with some of the biggest names in the business, Elton John, Don Henley, Paul Simon, I don't know who-all. Not just in the U.S.A. Overseas. Japan. Australia. Even Russia.”

Outside, Bohannon dumped the wheelbarrow and checked the sky. A few wisps of cloud to the west. Mare's tails. He judged them harmless, and he'd heard no storm warnings on the truck radio. So most of the horses out grazing on the fresh winter grass of the canyon slopes could stay the night. A few, highstrung or sneaky, he'd ride out and bring in now. It was growing late. He'd take Bearcat—the old bay gelding knew the drill. Back in the stable, Rivera was clipping the wire bindings on a bale of fresh straw for the clean stalls.

He said, “And now, for his greatest triumph, this Jeremy Essex will bring rock to the Central Coast of California.”

“Ah, but not for just one night, and not just one band.” To Bearcat Bohannon murmured, “Come on, old man,” opened the stall door, and led him out, hoofs thudding slow and solid on the planks. Bohannon bridled him, threw a blanket across his broad back, took



down a saddle. "For a whole week, a different show with a different headliner each day."

"You don't have to sell me, Hack." Rivera's voice came from one of the box stalls where he was laying down straw. "I will be the first in line for tickets. I will bring the entire student body from the seminary."

"Ruthann Cartmell will kiss you for that." Bohannon hoisted the saddle, but the old horse shifted ground a little, just for the hell of it, so as not to make things too easy for the man. He tossed his head and blew through his nose, pretending to be spooked. He was a great kidder.

"Stop clowning around," Bohannon told him. "This is serious business. Work to do." He put the saddle on.

Rivera said, "Will a handshake be all right?"

"Maybe for you." Bohannon bent to cinch the saddle girth. "But she'll feel she hasn't thanked you enough." He gathered an armload of lead straps and led the bay toward the bright doorway. "She may never smile again."

Rivera groaned. "I will give you the money, okay?" he called. "You buy the tickets for me."

On his way to Madrone next day, he detoured through green

hills and cool canyons to have a look at the Cartmell ranch. The last leg entailed a long uphill drive between rolling pastures from the main roadway. When the ranch buildings hove in sight through their grove of oaks, he let go the breath he'd been holding, and his heartbeat slowed. Earl hadn't come home. There was no sign of the boy's beloved monster Buick convertible from the gas-guzzling years before he was born. Only the yellow pickup, and beside it a flashy red European sports car. Bohannon pulled his green GM up next to them, switched off the engine, jumped down, and stretched. It was quiet. Chickens clucked. In reeds down by the creek, redwings piped. He climbed porch steps and knocked. The sports car said she had company, so Ruthann ought to be stirring, but no one came.

He hiked around the sprawling house to the rear. A lone horse in the paddock swished flies with its tail. He knocked on the frame of the back door, and fat little Maria Cortez came waddling. "Señor Hack." She smiled, and unhooked the screen door. The smile was unexpected. Back before Hubert Cartmell had married Ruthann, Maria had always been cheerful. Not since. She'd never desert Cartmell. But she meant

to sulk until that upstart girl left his house forever.

He touched his hatbrim. "Where's Mrs. Cartmell?"

"Out riding." Maria seemed charmed by the idea. "With that nice Englishman." She gaily waved Bohannon to the breakfast nook. "Sit down, Señor Hack. It has been a long time since you came to this house." From the stove, she brushed away whatever answer he might have tried for. "I know why, but you were wrong. And you have come back at a happy time." She brought him coffee and slices of pan dulce, a lemony sweet Mexican bread whose taste, wherever he met it, brought him back to this house in memory.

He was a little startled. "A happy time?"

"*Si*. I am ashamed to say that for all these years, I did not like or trust Señora Ruthann. God forgive me, I hated her. I believed she had only married Señor Hubert for his money. What else could a young girl like that want with a man old enough to be her father? She was waiting for him to die, no? Then she would sell this rancho and go off with the money."

Bohannon buttered a slice of pan dulce. "You weren't the only one who believed that." He began to eat.

"Ah, but I was mistaken.

When Señor Hubert died, I thought that I alone was left to defend this rancho and its memories. He had provided for me in his will and had implored me to stay on. It was not necessary. This is my home. I have no other. It was his mother who hired me, when I was still a girl, when this house was new. I was here when he married Señora Dorothy, when Earl was born. I nursed La Vieja through her last illness, then years later Señora Dorothy, when she died so young. And last the señor himself. Who else remained to save this rancho from the evil designs of that grasping girl?"

Bohannon drank some of Maria's rich coffee. "But now you know you had her wrong. We all did. She's told me. She feels the same way you do about the ranch."

Maria nodded so hard two tortoiseshell combs fell out of her hair and rattled on the floor. "I know, I know." She touched her bosom. "And my heart is glad."

"It's to raise money to pay the taxes and get some beef stock back on the place that she's going to let this man Essex put on his rock festival."

"*Si*. I have seen them kiss when they did not know I was nearby." Her face shadowed. "He was furious at what Señor

Earl did to her. He said he could kill him for that."

Bohannon said, "Earl brings out the best in folks."

Maria was thinking her own thoughts. "She is young, and she has been alone too long. She needs a husband. And Señor Jeremy—he is very handsome. But will such a man be content to live in this—this wilderness?"

"I wouldn't count on it," Bohannon said. "But they don't have to get married for him to help her save the ranch." Bohannon tilted his head. "That beating Earl gave Ruthann—did you see that?"

She nodded. "Earl does not want this—this *fiesta*."

"No. He wants to sell the place outright."

"Sí." Maria looked grim. "This is how he respects his father's dying wish." She heaved a sigh. "I pray to the Virgin daily that this place will be spared, that I may grow old under this roof and die in peace here when my time comes, but..." She broke that off. "Anyway, you want to know what happened on Tuesday. He took from his pocket a bundle of money. Ten thousand dollars, he said. He would give it to her if she would agree to sell the ranch."

"A downpayment on her half of the sale price?"

"No, no. She would still receive her entire half. He said this again and again. The ten thousand would be extra, a—a—" she waved her little fat hands "—a bonus?"

"A bribe," Bohannon said. "What did she say?"

"She asked where the money came from—it could not be his. 'What do you care?' he said, and tried to push it into her hands. She pulled away from him, shaking her head, putting her hands behind her back. She would not touch that money. When I saw how determined she was about this, I realized how I had misjudged her all these years. He followed her, shouting from room to room, and finally he struck her. This temper of his—he had it even as a child but never like this. He knocked her down. He kicked her. I was terrified." She crossed herself quickly at the memory. "I thought he was going to kill her. I am only a woman, but I could not stand by and see this happen. I ran into Señor Hubert's den to get a gun. But when I came back, Señor Earl he had gone off and slammed the door of his room. I ran to her. She was bleeding and hardly conscious. Somehow I got her to her bed. She would not let me call a doctor. She did not want the gossip to spread. So I nursed her. I owed her this,

for how coldly I have treated her all this time." She gave her head a glum shake. "You have seen only her face, but she has many bruises hidden by her clothes."

"She told me Earl packed up and left," Bohannon said. "Any idea where he went, Maria?"

"No." She rattled pans at the stove. "But that money was not his. So he will be found, Señor Hack. Do not worry. The one whose money it is—he will find him."

Now a ruckus started outside. Dogs barked, chickens squawked, children laughed and shrieked. A woman yelled for order. A horse neighed, and Bohannon heard hoofbeats. He made for the kitchen door, slammed it behind him; ran down the back porch steps. A pair of small dogs chased the chickens. Feathers flew. He grabbed one of the dogs up, then the second one. They wriggled happily in his arms and licked his face. A woman came running to take the dogs and pop them through the door of a camper truck parked under an oak beside the ranch house. At the corral fence, three young kids were yelling at the panicked horse. The oldest, a yellow-haired girl in ragged jeans, was throwing stones at the horse. Bohannon picked her up

the same way he'd picked up the dogs and turned to carry her, yelling and kicking, to her mother.

He set her on her feet. "You've got a mean one here."

Her mother slapped the girl. "Shut up, Deb."

Deb staggered backward, a hand to her face, dazed, amazed. "You hit me. You're a vicious bitch. I'll tell Daddy. He'll make you sorry."

"I'll vicious bitch you." Her mother lunged for her.

But the skinny little girl dodged and ran across the yard and around the corner of the barn, shrieking, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy," all the way.

The smaller kids, two boys, Bohannon guessed, stood at the paddock fence and stared as the woman stumbled a few steps after Deb and then gave up. The youngest one, maybe four, had his thumb in his mouth. Behind them, the horse stood in a corner of the paddock, sweating, trembling. Bohannon eyed him, concluded he'd settle down by himself, given time, took the boys by the hand, and led them to their mother.

"It's Mr. Bohannon, isn't it?" she said.

"Trish?" He scarcely knew her. She'd been a peaches-and-cream schoolgirl when he saw her married at this house eight, nine years ago. At the time,

knowing Earl, he'd worried for her future. Earl was a mean, sulky nineteen when she turned up pregnant, a simple sixteen. She looked hardbitten now, all signs of innocence vanished.

She pushed at her straw-dry, straw-colored hair, and tried to smile as she shook his hand. She'd lost some teeth. Earl had punched her around, hadn't he? "I guess I've changed. You haven't. You still look the same."

"I live an easy life," Bohannon said.

Her expression soured. "I don't."

"I didn't expect you would," Bohannon said. "But at a wedding, everybody hopes for the best. You here for Earl?"

"This is where he lives." She turned toward the house. "The lying bastard promised me a year's back child support payments two weeks ago. Swore to it in a magistrate's courtroom. But has he sent the money? Hell, no." She started toward the house. "So I came to get it. That's how it always is with Earl and promises. You want him to keep them, you have to catch him first."

"He's not here," Bohannon said.

She whirled around, white-faced. "What? Where is he?"

"He took off a couple of days

ago. I don't know where, Maria doesn't know."

"What about Ruthann? Did she go with him?"

"She's out riding," Bohannon said. "Maybe she can tell you when she gets back."

"'Out riding.' What a tough life she married into."

Bohannon saw out of the corner of his eye that Deb was coming at a drag-foot walk from behind the barn. He didn't want her tormenting the horse again. Which she might do—since her mother probably wouldn't put up with having stones thrown at her. But Deb came on without a glance at the paddock. She squinted up at her mother. "Can I have a soda?"

"Sure, honey," Trish said, hugged her, and stroked her hair. "You boys go drink a soda with Debbie."

"And leave that horse alone," Bohannon said. "Okay?"

They stared at him, as if they'd never heard a man speak before. Then they trailed off toward the Winnebago.

"They're just restless from the trip," Trish said.

"Teach them to be kind to animals," Bohannon said.

He had left the ranch house out of sight behind him when he saw two riders coming up the road through the pas-

turelands. He pulled the pickup off into brush beside a barbed wire fence and waited. Insects buzzed in the dry weeds. A meadowlark sang. As the riders neared, he could see that Ruthann sat her palomino gingerly, and he thought of those bruises Maria had mentioned. *He knocked her down and kicked her.* Essex was in his late thirties, small and wiry, handsome and aware of it. His Levi outfit was manufactured to look worn and faded, but it was new. So were his hat and boots. The riders reined up.

"Mr. Bohannon," Ruthann said.

Bohannon jumped down from the truck. "Just passing. Stopped in to see if you were all right."

"Hack Bohannon," she said, "Jeremy Essex."

"Bohannon?" Essex scowled at Ruthann. "Hack Bohannon is a friend of yours?"

"An old family friend," she said. "Jeremy? What is it?"

"He was in L.A. yesterday, checking up on me." He glared at Bohannon. "I phoned my office—routine when I'm out of town. They told me you'd been poking around. A writer friend from *Downbeat* left word for me at my motel." He turned again to Ruthann. "I assumed he'd been hired by the Sierra Club, or the estate agents." He

laughed wryly. "And now I find it was you." He shook his head. "Bit of a shock. Proves you never know people."

Ruthann looked stricken, and Bohannon lied for her. "You're wrong about that. Hubert Cartmell was one of my best friends. We went back a long way. When I heard about this proposition you'd made Ruthann, I thought I'd better be sure you were legitimate."

"And am I?" Essex said coldly.

"I'm satisfied," Bohannon said. "Don't blame Ruthann. I was the one who was out of line. Hubert never told me to watch over her, but she's young and I didn't want her to make a mistake if I could prevent it."

Essex reached out to press Ruthann's hands, which were folded on her saddle horn. "Forgive me?" He swung down from his mount, and shook Bohannon's hand. "I've been bloody rude. Sorry. It makes me edgy to be checked up on."

"Why?" Bohannon said. "You passed inspection."

"You think like a policeman," Essex said.

"Maybe because I used to be one," Bohannon said.

"Everyone's guilty until proved innocent?"

"If some of us didn't think like that—" Bohannon climbed back into the pickup "—what

would become of the innocent?" He closed the door and started the engine.

"Follow us back to the house," Ruthann called. "Maria's fixing lunch. There'll be more than enough."

"Thanks—I've got a lunch date in Madrone." He let go the parking brake. "Anyway, there won't be more than enough. Not this time. A crowd has arrived."

Essex had swung into the saddle, and he and Ruthann had started to ride on. She reined up the palomino. "What do you mean? What crowd?"

"Trish and the kids from hell."

"Oh no," Ruthann wailed. "What in the world for?"

"Seems a court ordered Earl to come through with his overdue child support payments. She's here to collect them. With blood in her eye. How can she afford a Winnebago?"

Ruthann walked the horse back to him. "That's their home—Trish's and the kids. They live in it year round."

"You don't mean it."

She nodded. "Earl won it in a poker game. It's the only thing he ever gave her he didn't later take back."

"Where is Earl, Ruthann?" Bohannon said.

"I don't know. He had a lot of money. He could have bought a

plane ticket to anywhere in the world." She frowned to herself. "When he beat me up, Maria screamed at him that he'd killed me. Maybe he believed her. Maybe he'll never be back." And now she smiled that wicked smile again. "Wouldn't that be nice?"

**T**. Hodges had bowed her head and was looking at her watch when the screen door banged behind Bohannon at the luncheonette in Madrone. T. Hodges wore her deputy's uniform, looked as always trim and fetching, and she gave him one of those smiles of hers that tried to conceal her upper teeth that stuck out a little and embarrassed her. The smile was mostly in her eyes. They were beautiful eyes, large and brown and limpid. Her smiles had a way of weakening his knees. He sat down at the gingham table and laid a gingham napkin across his knees. "Am I very late?"

"Only seven minutes," she said. "That's a record."

He told her about his stop at the Cartmell ranch. "Where would Earl Cartmell get ten thousand dollars?"

"Nobody's reported it stolen. Not to us."

"Can you check with Morro Bay and San Luis?"



"I will." Their table was on the screened porch. She peered through the main room of the eatery toward the kitchen. "Who's cooking today, do you think?"

"Not the one who burns everything," Bohannon said. "He or she only works the lunch shift one day a week."

"God pity the dinner customers," T. Hodges said.

A plump jokey young woman in a Raiders sweatshirt took their orders. When she'd gone, Hack said, "What does the sheriff's department think about the rock celebration?"

"That the roads can't handle the traffic," T. Hodges said. "That telephone complaints from citizens will jam our switchboard. That car crashes will keep the highway patrol hopping around the clock. That the jail won't hold all the beer-swilling, pot-smoking, coke-snorting teenagers. That the trash cleanup will take a month and cost half the county budget." She busied herself popping the can of soda the plump girl had brought, pouring from it into a glass of shaved ice. "Other than that, we think it's a wonderful idea. Lieutenant Gerard says the town council should give Ruthann Cartmell a medal for community betterment." She eyed Bohannon, who was tasting his

beer. "And you're siding with her."

"She wants to hang onto the ranch," Bohannon said. "I can understand that. Hubert would be proud of her."

"Not if he knew the way she was going about it. Hack, I'm surprised. And disappointed. That little blonde airhead has made a fool of you."

He shrugged. "The thing hasn't happened yet. Sharon Webb and Otto Tylson are agin it. They're on the move, and you know Sharon. She'll never give up."

"Mmm." The plump girl brought bacon and avocado hamburgers for both of them. T. Hodges tilted up the bun to inspect the meat. "You were wrong," she said. "The phantom scorcher has struck again."

"Damn," Bohannon said, but he was hungry and bit into his hamburger anyway. So did she, hopelessly. And in a minute, asked:

"Don't Otto Tylson and Sharon Webb make funny allies? I know he's all for recycling, saving the ozone, and so on, but isn't what he really wants the Cartmell property? Isn't it really Earl Cartmell he's siding with—not Sharon?"

Bohannon blinked. "Maybe I'd better ask him."

"Sharon will just die if he helps her stop the rock festival,

only to turn around and buy the ranch from Ruthann. In the long run, a subdivision there would do a lot more environmental damage than any rock festival."

"Sharon's heart is in the right place," Bohannon said, "but she suffers from terminal innocence."

No one was in the reception room at Otto Tylson's plush offices, but beyond the door marked PRIVATE he heard a sound that suggested somebody was there. He opened the door and looked into a big, handsome office with a picture window that gave a fine view of the mountains. No one was in there, either, but a side door wasn't fully closed and the sound was coming through that door. He said, "Excuse me," and poked his head into another room. It had been fixed up as a gym, with weights, bench, a rowing machine, and an Exercycle. It was the whirl of the Exercycle he'd heard. And Otto Tylson was pedaling it, studying a blue-backed contract as he did so.

He blinked at Bohannon, startled, then smiled a professional smile, got off the machine, laid the papers aside. He came in white tennis shorts, a T-shirt, a towel around his neck, and shook Bohannon's

hand. His eyes were intensely, almost unreally blue. His beautiful capped teeth gleamed in a crinkly smile. He was well-tanned, trim in body, stood straight, moved young. But he was past fifty. Hack wondered who the realtor went to all the trouble for. Not Enid, his sensible wife, who looked her age, and didn't mind it. Heiress of an old local family, it had been Enid's wealth that had set Otto up in business.

"Sorry to break in on you," Bohannon said.

"Always glad to see you, Hack. What can I do for you?" Wiping his face with the towel, Tylson went to a small icebox and brought out Gatorade. He held up the green bottle. "Care for a glass? Restore those minerals?"

Bohannon shook his head. "I'll pass. I hate rattling when I walk. Reason I don't wear rowels."

Tylson laughed and poured a glass of the stuff for himself and put the bottle away. "Come in here, sit down. Let's be comfortable." Bohannon did as he was told. Tylson tilted back in a leather executive chair behind a desk heaped with work. He'd made good on his wife's investment. He never stopped. The lights often burned late here. "You aren't thinking of putting your place on the mar-

ket at last?" he asked.

"I'm not quite broke enough," Bohannon said. "Anyway, if you buy the Cartmell ranch, that will tie up all your available funds for a while, won't it?"

"The Cartmell ranch?" Tybson's eyebrows shot up. "Somebody tell you I'm buying the Cartmell ranch? They're blowing smoke, Hack. It's not for sale. That former child bride of his is going to hang onto it if she has to ruin the whole Central Coast to do it. Haven't you heard about—"

"The rock festival? I've heard about it, sure. Even met Jeremy Essex, the fellow who's going to stage it. Ruthann asked me to check up on him, see if he was legitimate. I did that. He's bigtime."

Otto Tybson said, "Yes. That's what makes this thing so scary. There's money there, and power. Essex has already got the local Rotary, Kiwanis, the Jaycees on his side, the motel owners, the restaurateurs. We're fighting back, but show business types like Essex can run roughshod over anything in their path—forget about who's right or wrong."

Bohannon gave him a thin smile. "Over you, Otto? I wonder. Ruthann is only part owner of that ranch. The other half is Earl's, and Earl wants

to sell the place."

Tylson grew guarded. "So Sharon Webb says."

"Earl didn't tell you himself? He didn't come to you and ask your help in changing Ruthann's mind?"

"How could I help Earl Cartmell? To change Ruthann's mind? Has she got a mind?" Now it was Tybson's turn for a wry smile. "That's news to me."

"How could you help Earl Cartmell?" Bohannon shrugged. "By helping yourself."

Tylson frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Earl turned up a couple of days ago with ten thousand dollars. It wasn't his. What his father left him, he'd gambled away months ago."

"I know that. Everybody knows that. Turned up with ten thousand dollars where?"

"At the ranch. Offered it free and clear to Ruthann if she'd agree to sell out."

"And did she take it?"

"No. You mean Earl didn't report back to you?"

"Report back to me!" Tybson blinked, bewildered. "Hack, what are you talking about?"

"You didn't advance him that money to help you corner the Cartmell ranch?"

"You're kidding. Hand money to Earl Cartmell?"

"The stakes are high, Otto. That ranch is beautifully situ-

ated. Whoever develops it will make millions. A man of your experience might think ten thousand was a small sum to risk. After all, every realtor around here started sniffing the wind the minute Hubert Cartmell died. Why not put up ten thousand to secure Earl's promise to sell to you and no one else? Wasn't that the deal?"

Tyson squinted at him. "You really mean this?"

"I'm asking. For Ruthann. When Hubert was dying, he told her to come to me for help in case of trouble. And she'd naturally like to know what in hell's going on. No, she didn't get straight A's in school, but she's bright enough to know Earl got that money from somebody else. And I figure that person had a lot to gain."

Tyson laughed annoyance. "Why choose me? Why not Hickman and Macaulay, why not Sunny Beach, why not—"

"Because you're the only one fighting alongside Sharon Webb to block Ruthann's plan to save the Cartmell ranch."

"Oh, come on, Hack. You're overplaying the private detective bit. This is life, not junk television." Tyson laughed again but goodnaturedly now, and shook his head in gentle toleration. Bohannon had to hand it to him. If he was guilty, he was covering it masterfully.

Getting to his feet, grinning, he reached across the desk to shake Bohannon's hand. "Nice try, old friend, but no, sorry—Earl Cartmell never got any money from me."

Stuart Fitzmaurice was tall, fleshy, florid-faced, and though his family had been in America for centuries, he favored rough Highland tweeds, golf caps, tattersall vests, and carried a gnarled walking stick. On ceremonial occasions he'd been known to wear a kilt and a tam-o-shanter. He climbed out of his right-hand drive 1930's Morris and marched as if to the sound of bagpipes to where Bohannon was saddling Twilight and Ruby for a young woman and her ten-year-old daughter who stood by, the mother resigned, the child bright-eyed and so eager she couldn't stop fidgeting.

"Isn't it early for lawyers to be out?" Bohannon asked.

"Ruthann Cartmell," Fitzmaurice said, "is in trouble. She asked me to tell you."

"Give me a minute, please." Bohannon cinched the girth on Ruby and led the two horses to the customers, saw them into the saddles, gave some words of caution and instruction, and turned back. "What kind of trouble?"

Fitzmaurice watched the woman and girl ride out the gate and start up the canyon road through the long tree shadows cast by the morning sun. "Earl is dead," he said. "Shot to death."

"I can't say I'm surprised," Bohannon said, "but it seems to me that should mean an end to Ruthann's troubles."

Fitzmaurice didn't see the humor. He shook his head. "She's been arrested. On suspicion of murder."

"No." Bohannon frowned. "Tell me about it."

"The sheriff's version? Right. Earl arrived home at midnight, she was waiting for him in the dark, and when he turned off the lights and climbed out of his car in front of the house, she shot him through the chest with one of Hubert Cartmell's rifles. His children discovered the body—" Fitzmaurice took out a pocket watch and studied it for a moment—"scarcely two hours ago. The cook, Maria, had shoed them out of the kitchen, and they'd run around to the front of the house to play." He tucked the watch away.

Bohannon said, "Everybody in that house hated Earl—his ex-wife Trish, even Maria. Why arrest Ruthann?"

"Only one rifle had been fired," Fitzmaurice said. "Ma-

ria cleans and shines all of them up regularly. Only the one had any fingerprints on it. And those fingerprints, unhappily, were Ruthann's."

Bohannon led the lawyer to a white slat bench near a flowerbed. "What's Ruthann's explanation?"

"That the sound of a shot woke her." A bee buzzed at Fitzmaurice's ear. He absent-mindedly waved it away. "She ran to the den for a gun. She went to the front door, but she was too frightened to open it." The bee buzzed at his nose. He made a slow gesture like a priestly sign of the cross. "She looked out a window, but there was no moon, it was too dark to see anything. She waited for a time, and when nothing more happened, she decided it must have been a truck backfiring down on the main road. She put the gun back in the rack and returned to bed."

"She didn't fire the gun?"

"She says absolutely not."

"No one else heard the shot that killed Earl?"

"According to the sheriff's report—no."

"Not even Jeremy Essex?"

Fitzmaurice squinted against the bright morning sunlight. "Who's Jeremy Essex?"

Bohannon told him. "She's taken a fancy to him. I thought he might have slept over."

Fitzmaurice said, "His name isn't in the report."

Bohannon pushed up off the bench and walked across to the white fence of the paddock. A horse had been at the top rail with its teeth. Probably Buck, back to bad old habits. He fingered the splintery place but not thinking about it, thinking about Ruthann locked up at the sheriff's station. "They sure the bullet came from that rifle?"

"The bullet went clean through him." Fitzmaurice used the walking stick to help him to his feet. Or pretended to. He wasn't an old man, or a cripple. "And they can't find it. They messed up the evidence in several ways. For one thing, they didn't look for tire tracks until they'd run three county vehicles up and down the access road and all over the ground in front of the house."

"Tire tracks?" Bohannon cocked an eyebrow.

"Someone shot the man. Lieutenant Gerard is satisfied it wasn't Trish or Maria, and you and I are equally sure it wasn't Ruthann—that leaves an outsider, doesn't it?" He peered into Bohannon's face, shadowed by his sweaty old Stetson. "Someone who arrived in a car and left in a car. Perhaps this Jeremy Essex of yours?"

"Come to think of it," Bohannon

said, "he mentioned having a motel room around here. Probably on the beach."

Fitzmaurice cracked a slight smile. "Where else?"

"I know, there's a dozen," Bohannon acknowledged, "but he has a distinctive car. Italian. Red. Probably cost a hundred thousand. I'll spot it from the road."

"Unless after shooting Earl Cartmell, he left the area."

"Unless that." Bohannon nodded.

Bohannon drove the service road along the beach, slowly, studying the cars parked at each of the motels, even the cheapest. No sign of the red roadster. He hadn't time to check the motel registers. The horses wouldn't understand. He drove back up Rodd Canyon to his chores. But at the supper table, he learned what he'd feared. Rivera, who had come in the afternoon to make the beds and clean the ranch house, shook his head. "No, Hack. I'm afraid not."

With a mouthful of Stubbs's turkey stew, Bohannon blinked at him. "What do you know about it?"

Rivera didn't often smile, but now he actually grinned.

"What's up your sleeve?" Stubbs asked.

"Only what's up the sleeves of, say, fifty million other in-

habitants of this great land today."

"Something on television?" Stubbs said. "You know we can't get television up here."

"This is no time for games, Manuel," Bohannon said. "A woman's life is at stake."

"Forgive me." Rivera sobered at once. "Monsignor and I had dinner last night with generous donors at their beautiful home in Santa Barbara. Mr. Lorenzin has investments in the entertainment industry. And after dinner they asked us to indulge them while they watched a television program."

Bohannon eyed him narrowly. "Which one?"

"The Grammy awards." Rivera looked questioningly at him, plainly wondering if Bohannon knew what he was talking about. Bohannon knew.

"Don't tell me," he said. "Jeremy Essex was there?"

Rivera nodded. "And not just as a spectator. He was on the stage. In front of the TV cameras. He presented several of the awards."

"And the show went on till how late?"

"Eleven," Rivera said, "though it seemed later to the poor monsignor. He kept nodding off."

"Hack, it takes four hours to drive up here from L.A.," Stubbs pointed out. "There's no

way Jeremy Essex could have shot Earl Cartmell, now is there?"

"He could have flown up, chartered a plane."

"Sorry, Hack." The *Times* lay in a disheveled stack at Rivera's elbow. He pushed it over to Bohannon. "There was a big party afterward. In Malibu. It lasted into the early hours of the morning. Essex was there. Dancing with many celebrated women. Look inside. There is a photograph."

"Forget it," Bohannon said glumly. "Essex never really figured. He wouldn't murder somebody where he planned to put on a show. Bad for business."

Bohannon drove to Fresno the next morning. The automobile showroom was deserted beyond its plate glass. Only one car stood in the wide driveway to the garage. Inside the dealership, a lone man in a business suit sat at a desk, sorting papers into a cardboard carton. The door at the side was open. Bohannon stepped in. "Excuse me?"

"Out of business," the man said without looking up.

"I didn't come for a car. I came for information."

"Sterling has folded up," the man said. "Damn good car. The



Brits make great cars. But everybody wants Japanese, don't they? Shows all the good wars do."

Bohannon went to the desk. "A young fellow, very thin, very trendy clothes, bought a Sterling here in the last few days." Bohannon took out his wallet, laid his license on the desk. "I need to find him."

The man bent his head to read the license. He had a bald spot. He looked up. "I thought the only private eyes were on TV. And you look more like you belong in Westerns."

"Can you tell me the young man's name?"

The man gave back the license. "What's happened to him?"

"Something's happened to somebody he knows." Bohannon put the license away. "I need to ask him about it."

"Well," the car dealer said, smiling, rocking back in the chair, "he wouldn't be hard to remember. My last customer. Even if he hadn't paid cash."

"Whoa," Bohannon said. "That's a lot of cash, right?"

"It surprised hell out of me," the dealer said. "And if you want to know the truth, I didn't think it was his. Still—there's funny money around, you know. For big ticket items like luxury cars. Drug money, right?" He snorted. "Even in

Fresno, the raisin capital of the world."

"Drug dealers are all over. And they get younger and younger. What's his name? Where can I find him?"

"I had to do a couple things to the car to get it ready," the dealer said, "so I delivered it, so I know where he lives." He gave an address. "New condominiums."

"I don't know this town," Bohannon said. "How do I go?"

Dumping the last of the letters, receipts, computer spreadsheets into the carton, the man told him how to find the quarters of the boy whose name was not Cliff Taylor.

No one answered the doorbell. He tried the door. It opened. He went inside and closed the door. The place was handsome, still smelling of new paint, new carpeting and drapes. And something else. Unpleasant. It took Bohannon a moment to place the smell. Bleach. He went from room to room. Good furniture. Lavish electronics—forty inch TV, VCR, stereo receiver, compact disc player, enormous speakers. But there were signs of neglect. Videos, albums, books, magazines strewn around carelessly. A plate with a half-finished meal on it on a coffee table. A blanket tousled on the

couch. And in the kitchen, what looked like a half-assed chemical laboratory. He picked up vials, bottles, jars, and set them down. A book lay open. He closed it. The cover said it contained formulae for drugs you couldn't get in the U.S., that weren't approved yet. Drugs to help you fight AIDS. He laid the book down on the counter, turned, and a wasted, bald young man with a skimpy beard was looking at him hollow-eyed from the kitchen doorway. He said, "Are you one of Dougie's friends? He never mentioned a cowboy."

"Where is he?" Bohannon said.

"The hospital," the wasted boy said, and tears began to run down his face. "He's not going to make it this time."

"Which hospital?" Bohannon asked.

And the wasted boy told him.

It was a two-bed room, and serious trouble had drawn half a dozen white-dressed nurses and green-gowned medics to one of the beds, and Bohannon waited out in the corridor. He waited standing. Down the hall was an alcove with two chairs and a sofa, but a middle-aged couple sat in the chairs, faces stiff with anxiety. Prine's parents? Four young people overflowed the sofa. A plump rose-

bud of a boy, another one too thin, and a pair of manly girls, one of them in a grape-picker's straw hat. Friends of Douglas Prine? Bohannon turned his gaze from them to the room. Its door stood open. There'd be no point in closing it. Staff came and went too often and too urgently. So did equipment. The faces of the nurses, doctors, orderlies were blank, but what they felt showed in how they hurried. They were in a skirmish with an enemy that never loses. It was wonderful how they all seemed bent on winning, just the same. The elevator doors at the corridor's end opened. Five people stepped out. One of them, looking taut and pale, a bunch of plastic-wrapped flowers in his hand, was Otto Tylson. Bohannon had never seen Tylson wearing eyeglasses before; he was too vain for that.

Thoughtfully, Bohannon went to meet him.

Jeremy Essex had never come to bail her out, or for any other reason, so late that afternoon it was Bohannon who drove Ruthann Cartmell back to the ranch from the sheriff's after the charges against her were dropped. While they rode, he talked. "Otto gave Earl that ten thousand dollars, all right.

But not to secure the Cartmell ranch. It was a blackmail pay-off. Earl went to Fresno now and then to play outlaw poker in some back room. He sighted Otto on the street one night with Douglas Prine, got curious, spied out what was going on, took photos, asked Otto to pay him—a couple of thousand, no more. Otto paid him, but in a few weeks Earl was back, for five thousand this time. And Otto paid him again. The third time, he demanded ten thousand. Otto argued he didn't have that kind of money, but in the end he caved in and handed it over."

"And realized Earl would never stop?"

"Unless he stopped him. He couldn't get away to track Earl down, so he asked Prine to do it and call him. He would then go wherever Earl was and kill him—though he never told Prine that part. Prine said he was too sick, so Otto sent him to hire me. I told him there was no point in looking—that Earl would go broke and come home sooner or later."

"And he did," Ruthann said wryly, "didn't he?"

"That night Otto had worked late closing a deal and was eating at a cafe on the highway when he saw Earl's car heading for home. No mistaking that car. He followed it."

They drove in silence for a time. Then Ruthann sighed and said, "Poor boy," not meaning Earl.

"Otto loved him," Bohannon said. "Had for three years. Paid the rent, the bills. But while he was busy being a model citizen here by the sea, Prine was bed-hopping in the Valley. Otto knew it. He says it didn't matter. For eighteen months, Prine lied to Otto about what was wrong with him. He got away with it because Otto could only get to Fresno now and then, and never caught him at a bad time. When he finally admitted he was dying, Otto bought him a posh place to live, a fancy car, a monster television set—"

"Not life," Ruthann said: "He couldn't buy him life."

Bohannon turned off onto the access road to the ranch, and there came little Deb Cartmell, riding the horse she'd thrown stones at the other morning. He pulled the green pickup to a halt. "Howdy, cowgirl," he called.

She reined up and looked down at him. "Oh, it's you."

"You sit that horse very well," he said. "Do you have any other skills?"

She screwed her face up. "What kind of skills?"

"Ranch-hand skills, roping, shooting? Ever shoot a gun? Just for practice?"

She was wary. "What makes you think that?"

"Somebody took one of your grandfather's guns out of the rack the other day and fired it. I thought it might have been you. Just for practice." He grinned. "Hit anything?"

"A tin can on a fence post," she bragged, "first time."

"Some people are born crack shots."

"I wiped it off afterwards," she said, "like Maria keeps them. I didn't think anybody'd ever find out I borrowed it."

"Don't worry." He studied her, frowning. "Where'd you get the blue eye? One brown, one blue, that's unusual."

"It's a contact lens," she said. "I found it."

"Near where your father was shot?" Bohannon asked.

"How'd you know?" she said.

"It belonged to the man who killed him," Bohannon said. "Did you find anything else

around there?"

She looked at him doubtfully. "Such as?"

"A bullet, maybe? In the dust?"

She complained, "How'd you get to be such a good guesser?" She sighed noisily, dug into a pocket, and tossed him a little ugly chunk of lead.

He snatched it out of the air, touched his hat brim, said, "Thank you, miss," and drove on.

"You're fantastic," Ruthann said.

Bohannon shook his head. "I haven't saved the ranch."

"You've saved my life, and where there's life there's hope." She turned him a brave smile, but they both knew she'd have to sell. In a year or two, neighborhoods would cover these rolling hills. With luck, maybe some of the oaks would stay, as reminders of the way things used to be.

# UNSOLVED

by Ken Weber

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the October issue.*

From *Sine Timore* (the official newsletter of the National Association of Security Services)

Winner of this month's Trojan Horse Award is Stephen James, vice president and general manager of Vigil Security in Niagara. Stephen proved the aptness of his company name by breaking an industrial theft ring at a principal client: Category Tool & Die Makers in Monmouth.

Category, as readers of *Sine Timore* will be well aware, has been plagued by a rash of product theft, particularly of precision cold-rolled steel parts. The situation in this company has been aggravated, too, by what are possibly the worst employee-management relations in the Dakota Industrial Basin. A record three wildcat strikes last year followed what was supposed to be the resolution of a six month legal walkout. The spark in the case of each walkout was shop steward Horace Cater's contention that Category management was union-baiting in its attempts to stop the thefts.

Before Stephen and Vigil Security were brought in, as agreed to by both union and management, Category Tool & Die had been using the random search method, which, in seven attempts, had turned up only one uncertain suspect.

Stephen's first step when his company accepted the contract was to halt the random searches, then establish an inventory control marking system. Hand counts of inventory, compared with computer printouts, confirmed the company's belief that the theft was taking place principally at the close of shifts. Certain workers on the floor were apparently walking out with the heavy parts concealed on their persons or in carry-ons.

Since the company had already tried a security X-ray scanning system (which triggered two of the wildcat walkouts), it was obvious to Stephen that this method was not ideal. The third walkout had occurred when management initiated a hand search system of

the duffel bags that all shop floor employees carry from their work stations to the change-and-shower room or directly out to the parking lot, as they choose.

Every single employee responded in the next shift by carrying his or her personal items—and, management alleged, stolen parts—in cardboard boxes sealed with tape. Cater acknowledged that this was his idea, and that the union had supplied the cartons. As Stephen James explained to *Sine Timore*, breaking the taped seal on these breadbox-sized cartons constituted violation of privacy in the eyes of the union—a grievable action—and justified the “collective response” (which is what Cater prefers to call the walkouts). These were the conditions when Vigil Security took over at Category, but Stephen James was able to crack the situation to the satisfaction of both management and union.

His solution involved some minor reconstruction in the exit area where employees punched out their time cards. Before Vigil's involvement, Category workers at the end of a shift would walk through a pair of electronically responsive doors into a lobby, then through another pair of doors to the change-and-shower room. Before passing through the first pair of doors, workers would pull their personal time cards from a wall rack, insert them into the time clock to be stamped, then return them to a rack on the other side of the clock.

Stephen's strategy was to move the time clock and the second rack to the lobby. On only the third day of this system, Stephen was sufficiently certain of the culprits to detain them and open their sealed boxes in the presence of steward Horace Cater.

The success was total. Two of the guilty workers independently identified key members of the theft ring to Stephen in the presence of both management and union. The guilty parties are facing prosecution, and Category Tool & Die no longer has a theft problem.

*Sine Timore* congratulates Stephen James and Vigil Security, winners of the T.H.A. (No photos are published at request of Mr. James.)

*How was Stephen James able to pick out the workers who were stealing parts?*

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See page 120 for the solution to the August puzzle.

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FICTION

# Old Habits Die Hard

by Bill Pomidor



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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Roger's death promised to be far more interesting than his life ever was. Cowering behind a jagged granite boulder edging the creek, he sat and tried to catch his breath. Above the gurgling of the stream, each movement, each breath, even each *heart-beat* seemed to broadcast his hiding place.

As an unsuccessful insurance salesman, Roger had never been stalked by a trained killer, or even by a disgruntled claimant. So when his heartbeats grew steadily louder, he chalked it up to blood pressure or the way his hat squeezed his ears. Fingering the flaps aside, he could hear clearly for a moment.

*Plish. Plish. Plish.* Someone was slogging through the creek—slowly, deliberately. There weren't many campers out in the Allegheny National Forest in February. Not at midnight on a moonless night. Not marching through a half-frozen creek.

"Roger, my dear friend!" Hal's throaty chuckle echoed down the ravine. "Please, make it easier on yourself. This will only take a minute."

Hysterical laughter boiled in Roger's chest, threatening to bubble free. But the flashlight beam sniffing along the stream's bank had a remark-

ably sobering effect. He eased his legs beneath him, then turned to peer around the edge of the rock.

Hal skipped along through the creek in hip-length waders, tranquilizer gun slung over his shoulder. Humming to himself, he aimed the light along the edges, pivoting this way and that, searching for the spot where his prey had left the water.

Roger held his breath and prayed as the hunter flicked the beam over his rock and continued down the cleft. Francine had said that camping in February was a bad idea. Francine was almost always right.

She was wrong about Hal, though. In the six months since he had appeared on their doorstep, Hal had swept Francine off her feet.

True, Roger and Francine's life had all the excitement of a bus schedule. But Roger liked it that way—he preferred his rocklike solidity to Hal's carefree, breezy attitude. He didn't appreciate the disruption, the inconvenience of having Hal in the guest bedroom, having to make conversation at dinner *and* breakfast. Hal was always complimenting Francine, so Roger had to do the same.

But Francine was happier than she'd been since their first

year of marriage. And though over thirty years had passed since college, Hal had once been Roger's best friend—he'd been best man at the wedding. Flirted with Francine then, as he had all through college. So when Francine asked Hal to step in for Roger's retiring partner, her husband couldn't exactly refuse.

Even then, she'd been right. The business turned six figures in six months for the first time in its mediocre history. Hal didn't have a head for business—Roger did most of the risk surveys and drew up the policies. But Hal hadn't changed much since their college days all those years ago: he could sell prayer books to playboys and scotch whisky to nuns.

Amazingly enough, he'd sold Roger on the idea of camping in Pennsylvania in February.

"To celebrate your most successful year yet," Hal had suggested. They huddled in Roger's cramped office at the end of a long day. Cigarette butts and empty Styro cups were scattered among actuarial tables and manila file folders. Stale smoke hung in the air, and the ceiling tiles were stained yellow. "I used to love camping. Haven't been back to the Alleghenies in years."

"I'm fifty-eight years old. So

are you." It was hard to believe the latter, though. Roger felt—and looked—old enough to be Hal's father. He had given up comparing his ring of white hair to Hal's distinguished, grey-templed head; his potbellied slouch to Hal's proud athletic build. He sighed, tapping ashes into a half-full cup. "Aren't you ever going to settle down?"

Hal laughed. "I haven't yet, buddy. But I will soon."

"You said that thirty-five years ago."

"This time I mean it." He sobered suddenly, leaned across the desk, brushed the ashes aside before propping his elbows on the blotter. "I've finally met her."

"Who?" Roger grinned, picturing Hal making a fool of himself over a younger woman.

"The perfect lady—I'm serious!"

Roger just kept laughing.

He wasn't laughing any more. Roger creaked to his feet, felt his back and knees crackle as he stood. Hal had rounded the bend five minutes ago. Time to start running again.

Roger had left the camp with no plans other than getting away as fast as he could. He didn't have hip waders; the cheap hiking boots he wore were already filled with water.

But when he'd stumbled into the creek, he saw the opportunity to throw Hal off his trail.

The best course still seemed to be maximizing the distance between himself and Hal. The creek had worked once before, so he braced himself and plunged again into the icy flow.

On the way back toward the camp, the creek split into two smaller streams. The road was somewhere to the east, so Roger followed that branch. But the water was slower and shallower, covered by a thin layer of ice. Just when he realized he was leaving tracks in the iced-over stream, his right foot caught a rocky crevice on the bottom of the channel. He pitched forward, balancing himself on hands and knees and gasping for breath as half-frozen liquid coursed over his body.

Groaning, Roger leaned over to grab an ice-covered tree limb and pull himself clear of the main flow. His jacket, gloves, pants, boots—everything he wore—dripped icy creek water. He smelled like a dead trout and felt far worse. Though sensation was deep-frozen, his right ankle throbbed dully. He tried to free it from the boot, but couldn't unzip past the point of swelling. Glancing down at his torn jeans, he nearly gagged at the angry

purpling bulges at his knees.

Prickly needles of feeling fluttered over his toes, then branding irons sizzled his ankle and knees. He imagined freezing to death within yards of the camp. Hal would find him at the water's edge in the morning, glazed over with frost and ice, and laugh.

If he was going to be killed, he at least wanted to make it *hard* for Hal. Surprise the bastard, for once.

Clean, dry clothes awaited him back at the camp. Hal was long gone. Roger grabbed a sturdy stick and hobbled the last fifty yards.

He struggled into a dry set of clothes and pulled his thickest sweater over his head. Francine had packed three sets of gloves, four hats, and three pairs of boots. Though Hal had scoffed, Roger knew better than to protest. Francine was almost always right.

She had also packed the ridiculous rawhide jacket she'd made three Christmases ago. The leather hadn't been cured properly, and it had a strange odor. Worse, it was so stiff that it crackled when he walked. Reluctantly, he pulled it over his sweater.

At least she'd be happy that he was wearing the damn thing when he died.

Easing the boot over his swollen ankle, Roger sat beside the coals, imagined that the campfire was again roaring, that he and Hal had just set up the tent.

"So who is she?" Roger had asked.

"Who?" Hal poked the fire and watched amber sparks jump to the stars.

"Who do you think? This woman you were telling me about. How old is she?"

The veteran camper smiled, dark eyes fixing on Roger. "Fifty-six."

His friend chuckled appreciatively. "Very funny."

"I'm serious."

"Hal, Francine is fifty-six."

"Exactly."

Roger frowned, then hooted and slapped his thigh. "Never kid a kidder, that's what I always say. You had me going there for a second, buddy, you really had me going!"

The other man's voice stayed level and calm. "You know how I felt about her."

"That was in college." Roger shrugged, uncertain now. "I'm willing to let bygones be bygones."

"Some things have changed, some things haven't."

Roger felt his voice pitching higher. "Hal, that was thirty years ago. Francine's an old woman. If you want her so

much—" Hal hit him then, hard. Rusty blood trickled across Roger's tongue, down his throat. He coughed and gagged. "What the—"

"Listen, buddy." Hal twisted his friend's collar into a knot. "You don't know me. You don't know the first thing about me."

He let go then, pushing Roger back into the snow. "And apparently you don't know your wife, either."

Roger raised his hands helplessly. Apparently Hal had developed a mild case of psychosis over the past thirty years. "Let's just call it a day and head home, okay? Francine's a great lady."

"Too good for you. I stopped by your house more than once, while you were at the office."

"You *what*?" Hal's problem seemed more like frank schizophrenia.

"She wouldn't have me." He nudged Roger's elbow conspiratorially. "You're never going to believe this. Know what Francine said? She said, 'I'm still in love with Roger. And I always will be. Till death do us part.' Did you ever hear such sentimental tripe?"

"Mmmph." Roger fingered his collar.

"And that's where I got the idea. Of how to take care of you." Hal warmed to the subject, as though he were trying

to sell a policy. "See, after I got fired from the corporation, I had a hard time getting a job. Turns out, there's this small organization of highly skilled men—but tight, very tight. We really watch out for each other, you know."

Roger nodded his head but slid away slightly. Hal grabbed his ankle.

"Stay here—you'll be dying to hear this." He slapped his own knee and chortled merrily. "There's a lot of money to be made in our line of work. A few of the big American companies are having a hard time making it in the world today. It's a real jungle out there."

Hal reached under the tarp they'd stretched out beside the fire.

"So I've made a killing, you might say. Several of them, actually. I just bought a house near Hilton Head. Francine'll love it—that's where she wants to retire, isn't it?"

Roger tried to shake free, but Hal's grip was like iron. "Hal, you're an insurance salesman. And a damn good one, too."

"I'm serious about wanting to settle down, Roger. I just have one more job to do. It won't hurt a bit, and it'll look like an accident. See, these tranquilizer—"

As Hal whipped the gun from under the tarp, Roger sprang forward, directly at him. The

gun clattered to the ground and went off; a dart whipped past his ear. Roger sprang for the gun and pointed it at Hal.

His old friend walked toward him, hand extended. *What the hell?* He pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

"It's a Smithfield .177 air gun." Hal hadn't even blinked. "Low muzzle velocity, so the dart hardly leaves a mark. Single shot, though. Sorry."

Roger swatted at Hal, who ducked effortlessly.

"This isn't the Stone Age, you know. Killing has become—far more sophisticated—than hitting someone over the head with a rock—or shooting them with a bullet." He kept ducking and backing, then finally caught the barrel and jerked it from Roger's hands. He thumbed a pocket open. "The medication in these darts acts so quickly that it'll be cleared from your body by the time you're dead. The car crash will look like an accident."

His prey was across the camp and into the creek before Hal could elaborate further.

It was by sheer chance that Roger stumbled across the road. A cloudy night, and moonless, and beginning to snow. He had never realized it could be this dark. His crutch slipped in some gravel, and he

felt a glimmer of hope.

Not that anyone would be driving along an access road in the Allegheny Forest at this hour. In fact, he hadn't noticed any cars at all on the drive in from the highway. He wondered if the park was closed.

No matter. He'd stripped a flat wire from his backpack's frame. Roger had locked himself out of his car so many times that he was a veteran at breaking into locked vehicles. Maybe he could hotwire the starter on Hal's Blazer—it looked easy enough on television shows.

The jeep stood on a small rise, so Roger followed the road uphill. Sure enough, it loomed into view as a dark black lump in a sea of dark white. He imagined Hal lurking behind the bumper, behind the wheel, the Blazer roaring to life just as he crossed in front of it. But he had no choice—the truck was his only hope.

Fingers half-numb and stiff with cold, Roger wrestled the wire into the proper shape, then jammed it into the crack between the window and the door.

All hell broke loose. Headlights flashing, horn blowing, and a siren whining from somewhere inside the hood. The damned thing was wired for theft. Roger had walked into a trap.

There was simply no way out.

He didn't try to get away. Instead he stood there, mustering his jangled thoughts in the clamor of horns and sirens, thinking.

Calmly, he surveyed the top of the Blazer. With a nod, he hobbled off the side of the road. One thing, the headlights sure made it a lot easier to see—at least intermittently. Sitting on the edge of the roadside ditch, he dug in the snow, eventually unearthing several large stones and cradling them in his jacket. Slumped over, he limped back to the vehicle.

As quickly as he could, Roger piled the rocks and the walking stick onto the roof, which was above the level of his head. Hal had proudly pointed to the jacked-up suspension, telling Francine that he'd have no trouble getting through heavy mountain snow. Roger turned back to the driver's window—his wire still dangled from the crack. He finished the job, partly opening the door so the dome light shone. Hal would have to approach the Blazer carefully, since Roger could be hiding inside.

He started on a more formidable task: mounting the slippery roof with a twisted ankle and two bad knees. He stripped his gloves off and grabbed the

handle of the rear hatch. Straining, he stepped onto the rear bumper as the weight of thousands of chocolate bars, barrels of ice cream, and millions of potato chips settled on his shoulders.

Remembering Francine's words to Hal made him feel just a bit lighter. Roger was so shocked when he surged onto the roof that he almost slipped off again. He settled down in the bed of snow, already three inches deep, and awaited his hunter.

He had slipped into a half-frozen trance before he heard footsteps near the front of the jeep. In the flashing headlights, Hal's stride was only slightly less self-assured than it had been. A smile trickled across his face, as though he enjoyed the challenge. He stopped at the door, opened it, and leaned inside.

Roger was crouched at the edge of the roof, waiting for Hal's head to appear again, when he heard a voice behind him.

"An excellent chase, buddy. But I'm afraid your time is up."

Roger spun in time to catch the full force of a dart in his belly. The air whoofed from his lungs, knocking his wind out. He crouched, hugging his chest and fighting for breath.

"Easy, fella. Easy." Hal pat-

ted his arm. His voice was gentle, compassionate. "Everything'll be all right. You'll be going to sleep soon. And then you'll have a small accident. It's better this way—my friends aren't so nice. They'd be upset if anything happened to me."

Roger felt as if his stomach had been splayed open by a pile driver. He retched and gasped and coughed and choked. But slowly the pain began to ebb.

Problem was, he was still awake. *Why?*

He slumped down on the roof of the jeep, still clutching one stone in his hand. Hal stepped onto the seat below, then clambered up to grab his victim's shoulders.

Roger flew onto his back, arcing the rock in a great roundhouse that ended at Hal's forehead. The blow was harder than he'd intended, for the ice had made him spin too quickly. Hal crashed silently to the ground. Roger peered over the edge of the roof.

Sometimes, the old ways were still the good ways.

"Such a kind man—a *gentle* man," Francine commented at the gravesite. She turned to her husband. "I'm so sorry—sorry for you, dear. Your friendship had just begun again."

"Mmmph," said Roger.

Francine bent to grab a



handful of dirt and toss it down on the casket. A flurry of snow followed it into the grave. "Strange that he decided to drive off like that, in the middle of the night."

"He said he'd forgotten his medicine—he knew of an all-night pharmacy near the park."

"Funny, isn't it?" Francine frowned up at him. Gray-haired but trim, with blue eyes still bright, she was a handsome woman. Still classy. Classier than Roger would ever be. "I mean, if he hadn't decided to run off like that, he wouldn't have crashed the jeep. So in an odd way, it was the medicine that killed him, wasn't it?"

"Sort of, I guess." Roger picked up a handful of dirt and tossed it into the pit. A chunk of gravel clanged against the metal coffin.

"A very good man," she repeated as they turned from the grave to walk back to their car. "But there was something different about him, too."

With a wry smile, she added, "We all have our dark sides."

Roger put an arm around her shoulders and hugged her close. The smelly leather jacket crackled, but he didn't mind a bit. The center of the coat bore a tiny dimple—just over his belly—but no hole.

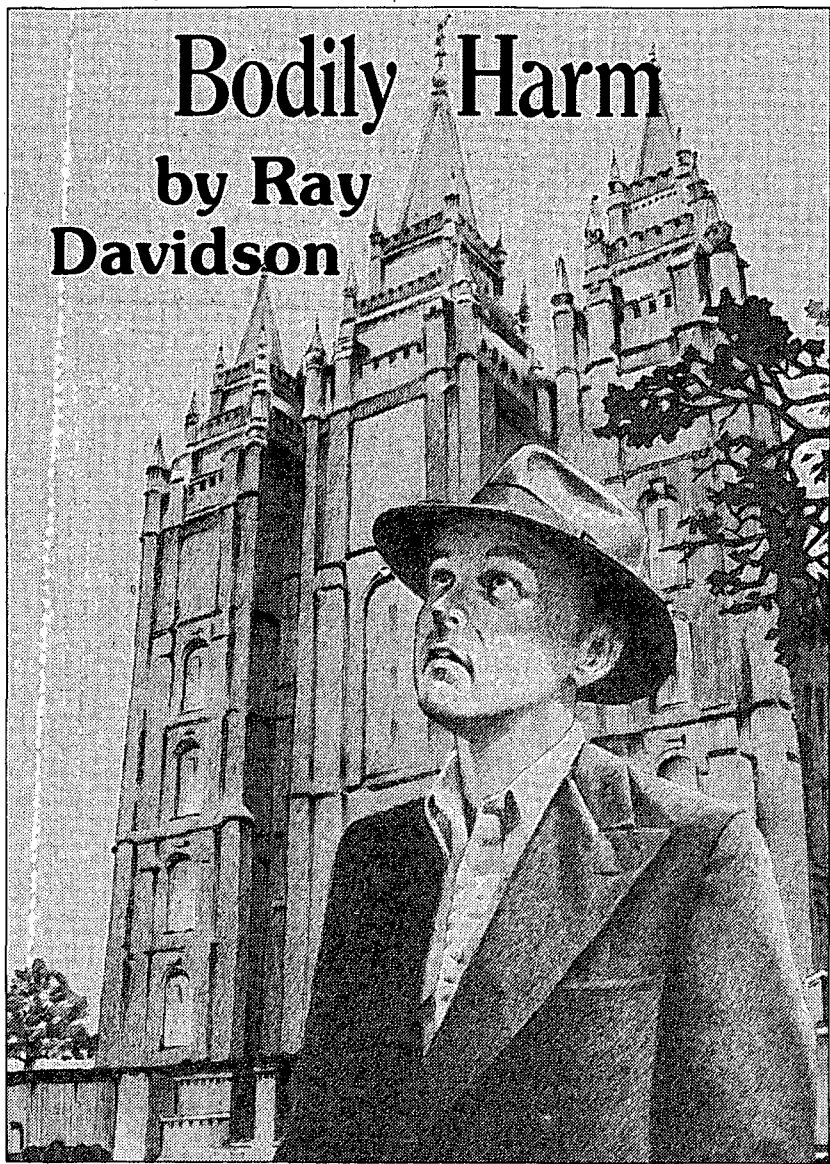
Francine was almost always right.

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FICTION

# Bodily Harm

by Ray  
Davidson



*Illustration by Charles Demorat*

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“Herringbone” Tweede (Private Investigations) settled back in his secondhand swivel chair—it screeched a protest at him that he ignored—and glanced around his new, slightly damp office. A lingering and pervasive smell of latex paint clung to the place. It had been newly renovated, a third floor interior in a spruced-up but doddering old brick building on Third West between First and Second South. It certainly wasn’t the Eagle Plaza—not even the Judge Building, which was old enough but was also a Revered Landmark—and it certainly wasn’t on Main or State. Nevertheless, it would do. The move from L.A. to Salt Lake City had taken a lot out of his reserves. It had also calmed his nerves, which was the whole point. He had felt himself relaxing ever since.

Why Salt Lake? It was the thousandth time he had asked himself that question. He shrugged his shoulders. Even now, he wasn’t sure. Paul’s wife—Paul Holroyd, his friend who was “on the administrative side” in the L.A. police department—was a Mormon from Salt Lake, but that hadn’t much to do with it, he had to admit. The truth? Come on, confess! He was running away.

He had finally had to admit that L.A. was sick—perhaps terminally so. The drugs, the gang killings, the police brutality, the entirely too casual lifestyle (*Who cares? They don’t like it, they can lump it! All I care about is Number One, man—like, me!*) had finally turned him off.

Still, why Salt Lake? His lips curved in a little rueful smile. Even alone, he couldn’t get away from the habit of querying motives. Evidently he wasn’t going to let himself get away with mere impulse. All right, he asked himself, why?

Well, for one thing, the Utah lifestyle wasn’t likely to plunge him into a sea of divorce cases, with which he was heartily fed up. Utah wasn’t nearly as prone to divorce as California. And, of course, there was the scenery—gorgeous mountains and skiing (if you wanted it) within less than an hour’s drive from Brigham Young’s outstretched hand at the intersection of Main and South Temple. Sure, he could have transplanted himself to Seattle or Denver or Phoenix. But it had turned out to be Salt Lake. For now, anyway.

It was going to be slow for a while. He’d factored in a cushion to hold him over until the business could carry him again—if it ever could—but it

would be tight, no doubt about it. Still . . . he felt the accumulated tensions of Lalaland slowly draining away and felt good.

With a sigh, he picked up a copy of Monday's *Tribune* and leafed through it, looking for his ad. Discreet. Just enough to identify the service without suggesting anything specific. Not the best location in the paper, but not in the lifestyle section, at any rate.

The phone rang. He picked it up, and a brittle, breathless female voice that might have been drawn in acid if you could draw a voice told him she wanted him to get the goods on that lowdown so-and-so "... who's been cheating on me for six months now, and I'm going to take him for everything he's got. Hey! Do you do contingency-fee work?"

"I don't do any divorce work," he said and hung up on the protest. So much for the Utah lifestyle. He turned back to the *Tribune* and briefly considered revising the ad. Then an item on page three caught his eye.

BODY OF BOY FOUND ON JORDAN  
RIVER BANK  
YOUNG VICTIM OF PHYSICAL ABUSE  
DISCOVERED BY FRIEND

*At approximately 4:45 P.M.  
Sunday, the body of a 13-*

*year-old boy was discovered on the west bank of the Jordan River in the Riverton area by his 12-year-old friend, Scott Truscott of South Jordan. The body had been hidden in a clump of river weeds, weighted down by two stones. "We used to go exploring there," young Scott reported. "It was . . . it was pretty awful. He was just lyin' there . . ."*

Tweede skimmed the rest of the short report, his mouth thinned with distaste, until the closing two sentences caught his eye.

*"... no evidence of sexual assault," Sheriff's Deputy Clarence "Skipper" Harrison said. "He was killed by a blow to the head causing grievous bodily harm, then disposed of, so far as we can tell."*

Tweede shook his head and laid the paper aside. Grievous bodily harm! "No matter where you go . . ." he muttered and picked up the cherry Danish from the small foam-plastic serving plate on his desk. He took a bite and almost wished Paul were sitting across from him, disputing possession.

Chewing, he picked up the paper again and turned to the comics to see what Calvin and Hobbes were up to. It was not the most fortunate choice. Suddenly, in his mind's eye, he could see Calvin lying mute in a patch of reeds weighted down by a couple of rocks. He switched to Beetle Bailey. No kids. No divorce. Just Beetle getting beaten to a pulp by Sarge. Luckily, his bones seemed to mend fast. He always made the next day's strip as good as new, and as cocky.

The phone rang and he reached for it with a sense of mingled hope and pessimism. Probably another "get me the goods on that no-good two timer" request. On the other hand . . .

"Herringbone?" Paul Holroyd's indistinct baritone came over the wire with scarcely any distortion at all. It was amazing what telephone technology could do these days. "I just got off the phone with the Salt Lake County sheriff. Seems they've got a homicide up there—a thirteen-year-old kid. We've picked up the father here in Los Angeles. They want him back but they haven't got their case for extradition together yet, so they've asked us to hold him for interrogation. They're sending a deputy down."

"So?" Tweede inquired.

"I mentioned your name."

"My name? Why?"

"I dunno. The Salt Lake guy seemed a little cocky to me."

Tweede sighed. "Thanks, Paul. Just what I need."

"You've heard about it?"

"I read the papers. You haven't answered my question. Why me?"

He could almost hear Holroyd shrug. "If you get involved, I don't want to prejudice you."

"If I get involved, it'll be a miracle. The law here tends pretty much to its own providence."

"Don't sell Salt Lake short, Herringbone. They can be touchy—there's a lot of room for pressure in Utah, but where isn't there? I've operated there, so they know me. That's how I met Olive. Anyway, if anyone asks, I've given them a recommendation they can pass on. How're you getting on?"

"I've only been here three weeks, Paul. How're you getting on? Lately, the department's had some knocks . . ."

"It'll survive," Holroyd said, his voice suddenly savage. "See you around."

The abrupt clatter of the replaced handset came along the wire like a minor explosion, and Tweede recognized one of Holroyd's rare rages in the making. Still, he had spared a



thought for Tweede, on his own in the Utah wilderness, and the office didn't seem quite so dreary as it had a moment before. He settled back in his chair and turned once more to the comics. For a second or two, Hobbes seemed to speak with the voice of Paul Holroyd.

The call came two days later. Tweede was reading in the *Deseret News* (he took both papers) about the extradition of a Timothy Langham from the L.A. county jail to face charges of homicide in the savage beating death of his son, thirteen-year-old Lawrence Langham. The voice in his ear identified itself as Mrs. Timothy Langham.

"Mr. Tweede? I wonder if I could have an appointment to consult you? It's about the death of my—my son . . . Larry. The sheriff said . . . excuse me a moment . . ."

Acutely uncomfortable, Tweede waited. A few minutes later, the voice came on again, still a little uncertain but with an assumed briskness it had lacked earlier. "The sheriff said that someone in the Los Angeles police had recommended you. He seemed to think . . ."

"If it would be easier for you, I could come wherever you are instead of your having to come

clear downtown," Tweede suggested.

"Oh, could you? Thank you so much. I . . . It's 438 South Thorn Road, Riverton. Thorn Road parallels Redwood Road about four blocks east. I have to go out for a couple of hours. My husband . . . I'll be home after four."

"Thank you, Mrs. Langham. I think I can find it."

He cradled the handset and turned back to the newspaper.

*"Timothy Langham of Riverton was returned to Utah today as a suspect in the death of his son, Lawrence Langham, 13, whose body was found on the west bank of the Jordan River late last Sunday. Langham, a prison guard at the State Penitentiary at Bluffdale, was brought back to Salt Lake from Los Angeles by sheriff's deputies to face charges of first degree murder. As he was being led from the plane that brought him home, he protested his innocence to reporters, who were unable to otherwise interview him when sheriff's deputies turned them aside, bundled their prisoner into a sheriff's car, and drove him downtown to the county jail. Langham,*

*who left hurriedly by car  
last Saturday for Los  
Angeles, seemed . . .*

Tweede tossed the paper aside and glanced at his watch. Two twelve. So far, Riverton had remained out of his orbit. A little exploration might be helpful. He got out of the swivel—it squawked a protest at him, and he made a mental note to buy a can of Three-in-One—and headed down to the '84 Dodge Aspen that sat in its assigned place behind the old building like a rather faded wildflower in a patch of weeds.

Riverton was one of the series of incorporated towns that made up the jigsaw of metropolitan Salt Lake. It was on the fringe—open space leading up to the foothills of the Oquirrh Mountains to the west made a gentle, almost pastoral comment, or would have if it hadn't been for the Kennecott open pit looming above like an ugly, raw wound where a pleasant foothill had once been. Over the years, the whole mountain had been gradually gnawed down, chewed up, digested, and its remnants strewn about like the debris surrounding an ant hill.

To the east, the Jordan cut a narrow chasm through an area populated by cottonwoods and weeds while downtown Riv-

erton, in between, consisted of a single intersection with various businesses radiating out from it, mostly north and south like everything else along the Wasatch Front. Low one, two, and three story buildings in a variety of antique or merely older styles, all slightly shabby, stood shoulder to shoulder, presiding over the traffic. Tweede turned left at the intersection and headed east along 1260 South. Four blocks brought him to Thorn Road. He turned south again.

Four thirty-eight turned out to be a somewhat newer home, split-level, no garage but attached carport, little shrubbery, and a tree leaning tiredly before what seemed to be a prevailing flow of wind from the east. He glanced at his watch. A tad early. Should he wait or . . . He swung the car about and headed back north to 1260 South, where he turned right. A short drive took him down into the Jordan River gulch. Across the narrow bridge lay Draper, continuing the crazy patchwork of towns. He parked on the Riverton side and got out.

There was nothing, of course, to mark the spot where they had found the body. He had no idea exactly where that might have been. The stream—hardly a river in any sense of the



word—wandered lazily between its banks as though it couldn't make up its mind exactly where it wanted to go. Clumps of cottonwoods hid it from view every so often. And as often, it lay exposed among the weeds and shrubbery that crowded to its edge.

It was not unfrequented. Pathways worn in the undergrowth led here and there, and the remnants of various kinds of R and R, in the form of beer cans and soft drink cans, were scattered about along with scraps of newspapers, candy wrappers, and other debris. It was the sort of place that kids Larry Langham's age would go to spend an idle hour or two, experiment a little with cigarettes or whatever. He spied a discarded condom lying nakedly open against the root of one of the cottonwoods at the edge of a small copse. Older kids, too, apparently.

He looked about for another four or five minutes, then turned back. He had the feel of the place, for what that was worth. Otherwise, it hadn't been much help. He returned to the Aspen and drove back to 438 Thorn Road.

The woman wasn't exactly what he'd expected from her voice and from his preconception of the case. Women married to violent men, the kind

that beat their kids to death, are often either defensive, somewhat withdrawn clinging vines, or brassy pushers, too glib for their own good. Mrs. Langham just didn't fit the bill. She was around forty, inclined to put on weight, with a normally friendly but direct and forthright manner. There was a stubbornness around her jaw and a clear compassion in her eye. She evidently saw the whole world, and as it was, but didn't judge it too harshly on the one hand or excuse it on the other. Between her phone call and his coming, she had managed to come to tentative terms with her personal tragedy, though a slight puffiness below her eyes suggested it had not been easy.

"First of all, I want you to understand that my husband didn't kill our son," she said when they were seated in the living room facing each other across a magazine-laden coffee table. "Yes, Tim has a temper. He'll come home from his work at the prison, and sometimes he'll be so frustrated and down that . . . But he loved Larry. They were planning an outing next month. Backpacking down in The Arches. They were going to take Scott Truscott and a couple of other kids with them and have a ball. All anyone thinks about now is how mad

Tim got sometimes and how he'd argue with anyone about taxes and the IRS and about the inmates at the prison. He hated do-gooders who think the men are getting a raw deal by being treated like criminals. I mean, that's what they are, isn't it? But he didn't kill Larry. He couldn't. So you've got to start from that or you won't be any help to me at all. Do you understand?"

"Did he ever beat the boy?" Tweede asked.

"No. I spanked Larry a few times when he was younger, but Tim didn't—ever."

"So what do you want me to do, Mrs. Langham?"

"Isn't it obvious? I want you to prove that Tim didn't kill Larry. I've lost one of them. I don't want to lose the other. I—I can't."

"I can't do that unless I can prove he's got a solid alibi, or I find out who did, and prove it. Where was your husband at the time the boy was killed?"

For the first time her composure wavered, and her steady regard shifted from his face to something over his shoulder. "I... I don't know. For some reason, he's not telling me the truth about that. At first, I thought he was at work—he works... worked... nights—but apparently he wasn't. At work, I mean. The prison peo-

ple say he phoned in sick, but he wasn't sick. I'd have known. I was out most of the evening. It was the Relief Society board meeting at the Stake Center, and when I came home, I was tired and just went to bed."

"Relief Society?"

"Oh, you're not LDS, I guess. It's a church thing for women."

"I see. Where was the boy?"

Her distress was evident now. She twisted her hands in her lap and looked down at them, but he didn't think she was seeing them at all. "He—he was supposed to be staying over at his friend's house. Scott Truscott. There had been a late afternoon basketball practice at the Ward—the church meetinghouse, you know—and he had arranged to go to Scott's for dinner and stay over and go to church with Scott the next day. They did that sometimes. I didn't find out until late on Sunday that the boys' plans had been changed. Scott thought he came home after the practice."

"When would that be?"

"I don't know. About five or five thirty, maybe."

"When did you leave for your meeting?"

"Twenty minutes to seven. I remember looking at the clock and wondering if I was going to be late. I had to walk, you see,

as Tim needed the car."

"Would the boy have been home by then?"

"Usually, yes. But I wasn't expecting him, of course."

"No. Where was your husband when you left?"

"He'd gotten up around five or so. He said he wasn't hungry yet and would get something for himself. He seemed . . . preoccupied. I did wonder if he was coming down with something, but he wasn't sick."

"He was still here when you left?"

"No. He went out about five thirty. I had hoped he would take me to the meeting, but . . ."

"Do you know where he went?"

"No. I asked where he was going, but he . . . I thought he didn't hear me."

"And when you got home . . ."

"He was gone. The car was gone."

"Had he eaten?"

"Eaten? Oh, you mean . . . I don't know. There was a rinsed plate in the sink, but the orange juice . . . I keep a bottle of orange juice in the fridge for him, and he always has a glass before he leaves for work. But there didn't seem to be any gone from the bottle, and there wasn't any used glass."

The doorbell bing-bonged,

and she rose automatically to answer it. He could hear her voice in the hall. "Oh, Dan! Come in. Aren't you working?"

"I took a break. Listen, Marian, is there anything I can do? I mean . . ."

"Thank you, Dan, but . . ."

"Is someone here? I saw an Aspen outside, and . . ."

The man, tall, stringy, with a long, frowning face, paused just inside the doorway and surveyed Tweede. Tweede gazed back at him as Mrs. Langham moved past the man and into the room. "You're blocking traffic, Dan," she said. "This is Mr. Tweede. Mr. Tweede, this is Dan Glover, my husband's cousin. Mr. Tweede's a, er, private investigator, Dan. I've asked him to try to find out what really happened to Larry."

"What really happened? What d'you mean, Marian? Tim . . ."

"No, Dan." She shook her head. "I know you and Tim didn't get along too well, but you can't think he'd hurt Larry. Tim wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Then what's he doing in jail?" the man asked.

She shook her head again, this time near tears. "I don't know. He's—he won't tell me . . . Excuse me." She hurried from the room.

The man stared after her for

a moment, then turned to Tweede.

"She call you or are you out drumming up business?" he asked, truculence in his voice and in the set of his shoulders and the half-flexed arms ending in large, hardened hands.

"She called me," Tweede said.

"Why?"

"Sorry, but that's between her and me," Tweede said.

"You licensed? I hear private investigators got to be licensed here in Utah—Salt Lake County, anyway."

"I'm licensed," Tweede said.

Mrs. Langham came back into the room, her eyes reddened. "I'm sorry, Mr. Tweede," she said.

Dan Glover hurried into awkward speech before Tweede could reply. "Hey! You got a right, Marian," he said. "It's natural. Look, isn't there something I can do?"

"I don't think so, Dan."

"I know Tim and I ain't close, but he's my cousin and I want to see he gets a fair shake, same as you. Still, you sure this is wise? Where'd you find this guy? The Yellow Pages?"

"The sheriff gave me his name. Dan, I've got to find out what happened. I've got to try to save Tim. He didn't kill Larry. I *know* he didn't. Please, Dan. I'm all right. Just let me

get on with it. How long a break can you take from the job?"

He scowled, glanced at Tweede, then with an almost visible effort, shrugged it off helplessly. "It's up to you, Marian," he said. "I hope you know what you're doing. Listen, if there's anything . . ."

"I'll get word to you if there is, Dan. I promise."

"See you do. Sorry, Tweede. No offense."

He patted the woman on the shoulder and went. They waited in silence until the front door closed and his boots clattered down the front steps.

"I don't see any car," Tweede said. He stood at the window and watched the man stride off down the street.

She shook her head. "Dan is working over at the site for the Riverton Mall—demolition at the moment. Some old buildings they're tearing down to make way for the new construction. It isn't far from here. He'd have walked. He's—Dan's kind of a rolling stone. He has a car and trailer that he parks on the site. When this job's finished, he'll pull up stakes, and he and Trixie will go on to another job somewhere else. He and Tim grew up together, but over the years they kind of drifted apart. Dan means well. He's been . . . good to me these past

few days. Helped out when he could. I'm grateful to him."

"Trixie? He's married?"

"Oh no. Trixie's his dog. He keeps her tied up at his trailer. Besides his regular work, he acts as a night watchman at the site. Trixie earns her keep, he says."

"Mrs. Langham, why did your husband go to Los Angeles?"

Tweede watched her mouth tighten and a bewildered look grow in her eyes. She shook her head. "I don't know, Mr. Tweede. I really don't know. And he won't tell me anything about it. It's so unlike him to take off like that. He's usually conscientious about his job, and we talk. We've always talked. But now . . . I just . . . don't . . . know."

Her eyes had filled with tears again, and Tweede deliberately looked away. A photograph in a frame on a table by the front window caught his eye. It showed a man and a boy with fishing poles and a cluster of fish, each grinning into the camera. The boy's catch seemed larger than the man's.

"Is that your husband?" he asked.

"Yes, that's Tim. And Larry. They'd been fishing down on . . . down on the Jordan . . ." It was too much. The tears spilled over, and Tweede

watched helplessly as she put her face down in her hands and sobbed.

"Do you want me to come back later?" he asked after a moment or two.

She shook her head, and gradually, the shaking of her shoulders stilled. Presently, she raised her head again but made no effort to dry the tears from her face. She simply gazed at him out of swimming eyes and said, "He didn't do it, Mr. Tweede. Please help me save him."

Tweede sighed. "I'll do what I can, Mrs. Langham," he said. He stood. "Will you be all right?"

To his surprise, she smiled slightly through the blur of tears. "Oh yes," she said. "I'll be fine. The sisters are bringing in meals as though I couldn't do for myself at all."

"Sisters?"

"The Relief Society. The first thing anyone here thinks about when there's trouble is food. It's a kind of Mormon reflex. I guess you haven't been in Salt Lake very long, have you?"

"No, ma'am. I moved up here from Los Angeles just a few weeks ago."

"The sheriff's office gave me your name. They said you'd been recommended."

Tweede smiled. "An old friend in Los Angeles, Paul

Holroyd, who's an administrator in the Los Angeles police department. He doesn't want me to starve to death in a strange city."

She stood. "I don't know how much... I mean, we're not wealthy. I don't... I've never had anything to do with private investigators before. The house is in my name..."

Tweede shook his head. "I don't think you'll have to mortgage the house. I charge, er, eight dollars an hour plus expenses, but I don't expect I'll be working every hour of the day on this. I should be able to tell you if I can accomplish anything within a couple of days. You can decide then."

"That doesn't seem like very much," she said.

"Well, it's still preliminary," Tweede said. "We'll see."

He left her standing in the middle of the small but nice living room and saw himself out. "Oh, Paul!" he said aloud as he climbed into the Aspen. Anyone hearing might have wondered just what he meant by it. He wasn't even sure himself.

**P**aul had assured him that the Salt Lake County people were aware of him, that he, Paul, had put in a good word, but Tweede had always found it wise to let the authorities know

anytime he was engaged in a case that came under their jurisdiction. He wheeled the Aspen back downtown to Fifth South and 200 East. No parking place, of course. He finally found one a couple of blocks farther south on 200 East and hiked back to the county sheriff's office.

There was a certain smell of stiff formality in the air as he talked with Deputy Harrison, in charge. His credentials were examined and handed back.

"I think," Tweede said, "Paul Holroyd of the LAPD may have talked with someone up here..."

Harrison did a double-take. "Oh! You're that one. I shoulda remembered. Yeah, he spoke to the sheriff, mentioned you." The air cleared somewhat, though Tweede felt reasonably sure that the deputy was not very happy about him. The proprietary aura was strong. "You wanna talk with the investigating officer?"

"It would be a real help," Tweede admitted. "No point in wasting time going over stuff that's already established. I'd also like to talk with the prisoner, if it can be arranged."

Harrison grunted, thought a moment, then shrugged. "In our presence," he said.

Tweede nodded. "Of course."

"And his lawyer's... if he

mentions it." The deputy picked up the phone and punched a couple of numbers. "Brady in?" he asked. The murmur of a distant voice sounded from the handset, too faint to follow, while a still fainter echo seemed to float in through the thin partition of the walls. Moments later, a heavyset, rather paunchy man came through the door, glanced at Tweede, and raised an eyebrow at the deputy. "Yeah, skipper?" he said.

"Harrington Tweede, licensed investigator, hired by Mrs. Langham," Harrison said, indicating Tweede. Then, to Tweede, "Lieutenant Brady." He nodded at the officer. "The LAPD..."

"Oh, yeah," Brady said. "She was asking. Sheriff said to give her the name." He looked at Tweede again. "I knew Paul Holroyd from years ago. He was with the sheriff's office here for a while. You going to make trouble for us?"

Tweede smiled. "I hope not. Mrs. Langham wants me to prove that her husband didn't kill the boy. I told her all I could do was either prove an alibi, if he had one, or find the one who did it, if he didn't. Try to, I mean."

"You think he didn't?"

Tweede shrugged.

"How can I tell at this stage?

She's very positive about it."

"Yeah! Nice woman. But it's a strong case," Brady said.

Tweede nodded. "Maybe. It's all still circumstantial, though. From what she told me... I told her I'd make at least a preliminary investigation, and then we'd see. Can we talk?"

Brady glanced at Harrison, who nodded. "He wants to talk to Langham, too," he said. "We'll cooperate. I told him you'd be there."

Back in the little cubicle he'd come from, Brady sat down and gestured at a chair. Around them, over the glass-topped partitions, the hum of other activities intruded but also provided a kind of sound screen under which they could talk.

As Brady explained it, the evidence they had collected was what Tweede suspected it would be.

"The kid was killed by a violent blow to the side of the head—broke the neck. At least two more blows were inflicted, and there were a few broken ribs in a restricted area. No evidence of sexual assault. Clothes intact."

"That doesn't mean there wasn't sexual intent," Tweede said.

"No, but nothing to say there was, either," Brady replied.

"The broken ribs?" Tweede said, making a question of it.



Brady leaned back in his chair.

"We think he was kicked in the side. Not a lot of bruising, but if he was already dead..."

Tweede nodded. "Any idea where it happened?"

Brady shot him a glance. "He was found on the bank of the Jordan, face partly in the water, under some brush. A couple of large rocks kept him from drifting free. No water in the lungs."

"Any idea where it happened?" Tweede asked again.

"There was gravel caught in his clothing," Brady said. "We don't think it came from the river bank, but there's a lot of that stuff around."

"Gravel?" An idea began to form in Tweede's mind. "What else did you find?"

"Not much. Oh, yeah. A few animal hairs on his shirt—like he'd been sniffed over by some dog. Always a stray or two about. Usual stuff in his pockets. Nothing physically wrong with him prior to the attack. He'd been dead at least twenty-four hours. Rigor had come and was passing off."

Tweede nodded. "Thanks. Can I see Langham now?"

Brady grunted, rose, and they left the office and went downstairs to the cells.

Timothy Langham looked doubtfully at Tweede as Brady

explained. "Marian hired you?" he asked. "What for?"

Tweede repeated what he had told Deputy Harrison.

"Alibi?" Langham said in despair. "No. I haven't got one. I didn't see anyone that evening. I... I had something I wanted to think over, so I went off by myself. It... didn't have anything to do with Larry. I just needed to think. Look, Mr. Tweede, I loved my kid. He was... he was the only one I had. I wanted... Oh, God in heaven, how did I end up like this?"

Tweede waited a moment, hoping the man would calm a little. It took a while. Then, "Mr. Langham, why did you go to Los Angeles without telling anyone? Even your wife didn't know you were going. She still doesn't know why."

"I had... business there. It had nothing to do with Larry. How could it? I wish to God I'd never gone, now. If I'd been here..."

"What business?"

"Nothing." Langham had turned sullen. "Leave me alone, Tweede. The police can do what they like, but I don't have to take anything from you. Get away from me. Leave me alone."

"Same reply he gave us," Brady said.

Tweede sighed. "Let's go," he said to Brady. "I'm doing what

I can for your wife, Mr. Langham. I think you owe her something. . . .”

“Get out of here!” Langham shouted, enraged. “Damn you, leave me alone or I’ll break your neck! Listen, Brady, I want to talk to Marian.”

“As soon as you’re arraigned,” Brady said. “I don’t make the rules.”

“She’s my wife. I’ve got a right to talk to my wife.”

“After the arraignment. Come on, Tweede.”

Together, the two left the cell, Langham swearing loudly behind them as the cell door swung shut and the lock engaged.

“When is the arraignment?” Tweede asked when they were back in Brady’s cubicle.

“Tomorrow morning. We’ve stretched it as long as we can.”

“He’s got an attorney?”

“Might as well not have, but yeah, he’s got one. Mrs. Langham hired him. Langham won’t talk to him hardly.”

Tweede made a note of the attorney’s name. “Tell me something. What made you go looking for Langham in Los Angeles?”

Brady shrugged. “We didn’t, not specifically. We targeted Vegas at first. He was stupid about it. Used his credit card for gas. We got the account number from Mrs. Langham

and got onto the company. He’d charged a tankful at St. George. We sent out a bulletin. The L.A. police replied.”

Tweede frowned. “Doesn’t that tell you something?” he asked.

Brady growled. “I know, I know. But people are stupid. A guy’s running, he doesn’t think all that clearly. You tell me—why else was he heading for L.A.?”

Tweede shook his head. “How did the L.A. police find him?”

Brady shrugged. “We were lucky on that. It was kind of weird. He walked right into a stakeout of some kind. No way he could have known anything about it—just stumbled into the situation and had to be detained until they finished whatever it was they were up to. Then they let him go. Our bulletin came along about then, and they recognized the description. Caught up to him just as he was checking out of the motel he’d rented. Like I said, we were lucky.”

“How well do you know L.A.?” Tweede asked.

“Not much. Why?”

Tweede shook his head. “Never mind. You *were* lucky. It’s a big place. Use your phone?”

Brady gestured, and Tweede picked up the handset and

dialed. "That was a lot of digits," Brady said. "This long distance? I don't know..."

"Paul Holroyd, please," Tweede said into the mouthpiece, and Brady shut up, listened.

"Paul? Herringbone... Yes, I am... Look, Paul, the officer here, Lieutenant Brady, told me... I know. He mentioned it... I'll tell him... Listen, Paul, Brady told me that Langham blundered into some kind of stakeout you people were conducting down there, that that's how you got him so soon. What was it, or can I ask? ... I'm beginning to think it might. What's more, I think you do, too. You weren't being altogether altruistic, were you? ... I said 'altruistic.' ... I can't do that, Paul. This is a case of murder. What's the matter? Don't you trust your old friends here?"

Brady frowned, muttered something. Holroyd's voice buzzed softly in the earpiece as Tweede listened. Then he took a deep breath, in and out, and nodded.

"I thought it might be that. I'll get back to you... Yes, there's an angle... Not yet. I'll get back. Thanks, Paul."

Without asking, Tweede dialed again, a local number this time, Brady noted. "Mrs. Lang-

ham? Tweede. I've a question I hope you can answer. Was Mr. Langham in any financial bind? You mentioned that he seemed down on the IRS... I see. Thank you, Mrs. Langham... I think it might. Thank you. I'll be in touch soon, I hope." Slowly, thinking hard, Tweede hung up the phone.

"Just what was that all about?" Brady asked.

Tweede told him.

"Then who the hell killed the kid?" Brady said loudly, exasperated. "Okay, it makes a kind of sense. There are a lot of guys like that. Utah has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the nation, and a prison guard doesn't make a lot. But it's all just guesswork at this stage."

"I wonder," Tweede said. "Maybe if we talked with Langham again, made him think we knew all about it..."

Brady thought a moment, then shrugged. "Why not? Spring it on him, he might just talk."

Back in Langham's cell, Brady scowled at him. "You're a pretty miserable specimen, aren't you?" he said. Langham looked startled. "Your kid beaten to death and you're not even willing to help nail the one who killed him. All right, suppose I tell you what you

were doing in L.A. You were down there to buy cocaine. For someone at Point-of-the-Mountain. Somebody inside offered you a pile of money to smuggle in some crack, told you where to go and who to see, and you made a deal to get you out of your bind with the IRS. You can tell us about it now, or we can dig it out. Either way . . ."

Tweede knew Brady's position, knew he couldn't ethically go further than that. "They picked up the guys you went to L.A. to meet, you know," he said. It was a barefaced lie, but Langham wouldn't know that.

Brady glanced at Tweede, startled, then seized the opening. "You want your lawyer?" he asked.

Langham slumped on the cot, his face in his hands. He shook his head. "What good would it do?" he mumbled. "Yes, I made a deal. I was desperate. Mar-ian. The house . . ."

"Hold it," Brady said. "Let's do this right. I'll get your lawyer in, we'll take a statement. In the meantime, Langham, don't say anything to anyone."

Upstairs in the sheriff's office, Brady shook Tweede's hand. "How'd you get onto it?" he asked.

Tweede smiled sadly. "I just moved up here from L.A. a couple or three weeks ago," he said. "I know the town. And I

know the way the LAPD operates. It was hard to believe that anyone could just stumble into a stakeout. We still have a problem, you know."

"Who killed the kid. Yeah. It could still be Langham. If the kid somehow found out what was up . . ."

Tweede shook his head. "I don't think so. I've got an idea, but it's pretty nebulous at the moment. Let me ask a few questions around, and I'll get back to you. I won't mess up your case."

"What case?" Brady said. "If it isn't Langham, then we haven't got a case."

"Let me see what I can do," Tweede said. "Oh. Paul Holroyd said to tell you hello. He remembers you."

"Yeah. Thanks . . . You know, I could hold you . . ."

Tweede smiled. "What good would that do? All I've got is a suspicion, a ghost of an idea. I've no evidence at all."

Brady shrugged. "Go on. Get out of here. And remember, if you do get hold of anything, you bring it straight to me!"

"What else?" Tweede said, spreading his hands.

**B**ack in the Aspen, Tweede circled back to Sixth South and headed onto the I-15 going south. He exited at

Twenty-first South, cut west to Redwood Road, and turned south again. One community flowed into another—South Salt Lake, Murray or the edge of it, West Valley, Riverton.

"Dan Glover?" The workman glanced about uncertainly for a moment. "Sorry. I don't know just where he is right now. That's his trailer over there. You came past it just now."

"I'd better not go over. The dog might . . ."

"Not to worry. Trixie's gone. Disappeared. Dan's been pretty cut up about it. Blames himself for not fastening the lead right."

"Oh? When did this happen?"

"Don't know. Week ago, maybe. Look. There's Dan now coming up out of the hole."

"Thanks." Tweede made his way across the uneven ground toward the tall, lanky figure standing looking down into an excavation left behind when an old building had been ripped from its foundations. "Mr. Glover?"

Dan Glover swung about sharply and squinted at Tweede in the afternoon sun. "What do you want?" he asked.

"I wondered if you could help me. You said if there was anything you could do . . ."

"For Marian. Yeah. What is it?"

"Did you see Larry Langham

late Saturday afternoon?"

"No. Hadn't seen the kid for a week or so. Why?"

"It seems there's a sweater missing," Tweede said, improvising. "I'm trying to find out where it might have gotten to. His friend, Scott Truscott, says he was wearing it when he left the basketball practice to go home. I wondered if he might have stopped off here to see you . . . or Trixie, maybe."

"Nope. Like I said, he hadn't been by for a week or so."

"They tell me Trixie has gone missing," Tweede said.

The man's hard eyes swept him up and down. "I left the lead too loose. Damn dog slipped away, and I haven't heard or seen anything of her since. What has that got to do with the kid?"

"Mrs. Langham said he sometimes stopped to pet the dog on his way home."

"Yeah, he did. Not that day, though. Sweater, huh? I don't . . . Why a sweater? It was a hot day. Funny! Poor Tim."

"Well, thanks, Mr. Glover."

"Any time. I gotta get back to work. Anything else?"

"No. Thanks anyway."

Tweede turned and started back across the rough ground, his shoes raising little puffs of dust at each step. He could feel the man's eyes following him, but when he turned, Glover

swung abruptly about and stared down into the excavation again. Tweede shrugged and went on toward the Aspen, glancing curiously at the trailer and the small, tarpapered doghouse crouched near the hub of its axle. He wasn't watching where he was going, and his foot slipped on something unstable and loose. Gravel. He stooped and caught up a small handful, letting it slip through his fingers. Mixed in with the gravel were small shreds of hair, Trixie's, probably.

"What the hell do you think you're doing now?"

The voice came from close behind him. He swung about and confronted an enraged Dan Glover looming over him against the low western sun. On impulse, he asked, "Where is Trixie, Mr. Glover?"

With a grunt, Glover swung a haymaker at Tweede's head. Tweede ducked just in time. "What damn business is it of yours?" Glover grated, and all of a sudden, he was all over Tweede, hard fists, toughened with manual labor, pounding. Tweede dodged the worst, but his head rang like a gong and blood spurted from his nose. Another roundhouse caught him in the stomach, and he doubled over and fell, his teeth cutting into his tongue when

his chin hit the ground.

"Dan! Dan! Cut it out, you fool," a voice shouted, and three men came running from the direction of the demolished building to throw themselves on the berserk Glover, pinning his arms.

Tweede pried himself painfully from the ground. "Did you kill Larry Langham before you got rid of Trixie, or after?" he asked, panting. The men gaped and Glover sagged, going limp in their grasp.

"This damned temper of mine. Oh, hell! This damned temper! She never should have growled at me. I didn't even know he was there." And Dan Glover broke into loud, wretched sobs.

**"I** still don't understand, Mr. Tweede," Marian Langham said.

She and Timothy Langham sat together in Tweede's office in the old building on Third South. They had to sit close; there wasn't much room in the narrow lounge seat he had picked up for a couple of dollars at something called Deseret Industries.

Tweede touched his bandaged nose with tentative fingers. His voice sounded funny. He sighed. "It's a simple enough story," he said. "Larry

was on his way home and detoured to say hello to Trixie. It was late on Saturday, no one on the job but Glover. You told me he also acted as a night watchman and lived on the site.

"Glover was angry about something, and Trixie got frightened and growled at him. That made it worse, and he took a club to her. She was tied and couldn't run, so she fought back, snarling and yelping. He says Larry came charging around the end of the trailer shouting to him to stop just as he swung the blow that killed her. He hadn't known Larry was anywhere near the place. Larry screamed at him and threw himself on the dog to protect her. He pulled the boy off the dog and tried to explain, but Larry shouted that he was going to tell what Glover had done and started to run away. That was the last straw. Glover went after Larry, hit him on the side of the head and ... Mrs. Langham, you don't want to hear the rest.

"The police found some dog hair on Larry's shirt and bits of gravel in his clothing. That made me wonder if Larry had been on the demolition site that day. When I asked Glover, he said he hadn't seen Larry for over a week. I knew the dog hair wouldn't have lasted on Larry's shirt for that long. I

thought if I collected some bits of hair and gravel, perhaps the police could match them up with those found on Larry. Glover caught me picking some up and ... lost his temper again."

He looked at Timothy Langham. "You were lucky, Mr. Langham."

Langham looked down at his wife's hand in his. "Lucky?" he echoed.

"I had a call from Paul Holroyd of the LAPD this morning. He says that your testimony gave them the information they needed to locate the supplier and break the cocaine supply line into the Utah State Penitentiary. The county sheriff and the LAPD have decided not to pursue charges against you. I'm sorry about your job, but ..."

"I'm not. We're selling the house and going to Arizona. I got so I hated that job, Mr. Tweede. I think I ... started thinking like some of the men think. I don't know how soon we can pay your bill, but ..."

Tweede waved a hand. "When you can, Mr. Langham."

After they had gone, Tweede sank back in the swivel chair. It screamed like a soul in torment. Wearily, he arose and began rummaging in the filing cabinet, still mostly empty. "Three-in-One," he muttered.



"I know I bought . . . Ah!"

The phone rang. Tweede lifted the receiver. "Tweede," he announced, sounding like a kid talking through a pipe.

"You do investigations?" an angry male voice asked abruptly. "Listen! I want you to find out where my wife is

spending those afternoon 'golf sessions.' When can I see you? That lousy broad has cheated on me for the last time. Hello? You there? Hello?"

Gently, Tweede replaced the handset in its cradle, and leaned back. The chair sighed softly, and Tweede smiled.

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## **SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED":**

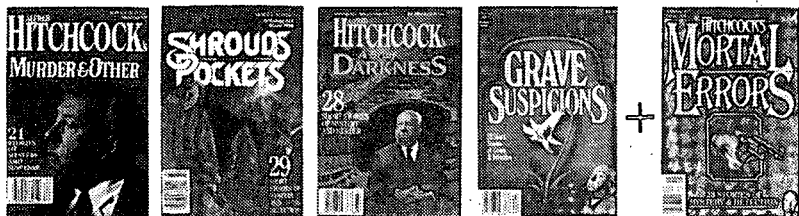
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Chief Gary Ellesmere has reason to be cautious. He's alone in an isolated area with only the word of an agitated man that a woman has been hurt or killed in the kitchen of the farmhouse. Extreme prudence would dictate that he wait for backup rather than go in alone, but Gary feels he has the perpetrator in front of him. It could be he is suspicious of the man for saying he was going back to the house for a drink of water. Why wouldn't he drink from the Tap or the Creek, since they're so close? Still, when the man said "Just past the creek," he might have simply meant "the creek" and not "the Creek."

More likely, Gary is uneasy about the man's alibi. He said he had been checking fences for the previous half hour, and pointed out the field. Gary could see the field had not been grazed for some time. Because the weather has been dry and hot, the vegetation, especially thistles and burdocks and similar weeds that thrive along fences, would be tall and hard and prickly. No one who knows he is going to walk the perimeter to check the fence would ever wear shorts. If the man's wife has been murdered, Gary will want a better explanation of his whereabouts before he went back to the house and discovered the body.

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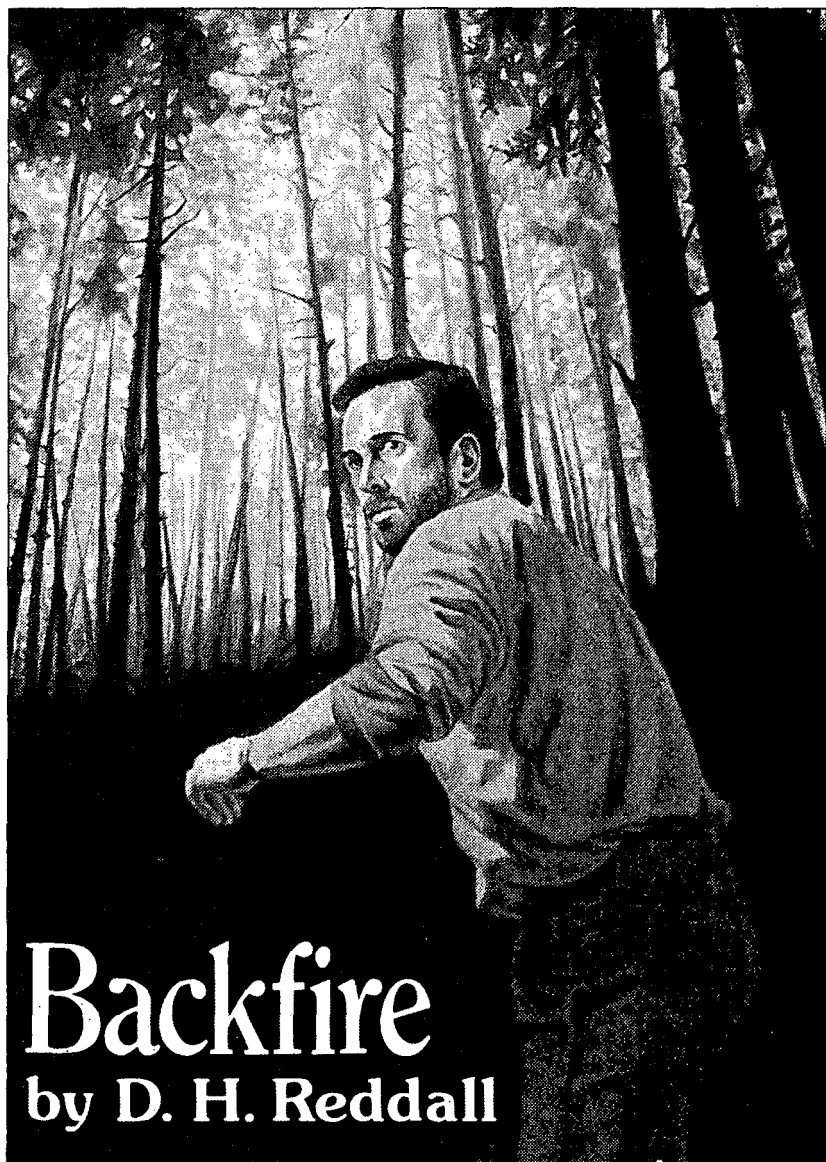
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FICTION



# Backfire

by D. H. Reddall

*Illustration by Steve Cavallo*

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The house was a modified Cape, its cedar shingles silvered by age and salt air. There was a lot of white trim, and several trellises were laden with wisteria and roses. It was an elegant place in a careless, unmanicured way, obviously inhabited by people who had money and who weren't self-conscious about it.

I parked next to a red Jaguar, walked across the crushed-shell drive, and was met at the door by two enthusiastic golden retrievers and a trim, well-tanned man dressed in whites. Walter Bigelow.

"Thanks for driving down, Stubblefield." He shook my hand and led me around the porch to some wicker furniture overlooking Quisset Harbor. Beyond the harbor a stiff sou'wester was whipping up the water on Buzzards Bay. Several boats were frothing along, sails slanted against the cloudless sky.

"Perhaps you read about my son's death last month."

"I did. It's a shame, Mr. Bigelow."

He nodded and looked out across the bay.

"He was just sixteen—healthy, well-adjusted, doing well in school." He sat back with a sigh. "My wife is inconsolable. Frankly, I'm worried about her. Robbie was our only

child, you know, and she—" He made a helpless gesture with his hands.

"How can I help you?"

"You can look into the circumstances of his death."

I recalled the bare facts of Robbie Bigelow's death. He and his girlfriend had taken Bigelow Senior's powerboat up the bay to Daryl Ruger's summer cottage—a distance of about two miles—attended a lawn party thrown by Ruger's daughter, and left somewhere around ten o'clock. They had boarded the boat, which was tied up at Ruger's dock, and had been blown into the hereafter when the boat exploded.

"Your son's death was ruled an accident, was it not?"

"Yes. The investigators concluded that the explosion was caused by gas fumes in the bilge. They said Robbie forgot to vent the engine compartment before starting up." Bigelow fixed me with pale blue eyes. "And that, sir, is a load of crap. Robbie was raised on boats, just as I was, from the time he could walk. Sailboats, powerboats, rowboats, canoes—we even went iceboating a few times. He'd been drilled in safety procedures all his life. There is no way—*no way*—he would have forgotten to vent that compartment."

I took a deep breath. "Please

don't misunderstand me, Mr. Bigelow, but this was a party—"

"Robbie didn't drink. He played baseball and basketball, and he studied the martial arts. Alcohol was not a part of his life."

I let that ride. Bigelow wouldn't be the first parent unaware that his kid drank or fooled around with drugs.

"The investigation showed no evidence of an explosive device," I said.

Bigelow slapped the table, hard. "Goddamn it, Stubblefield, I'm saying that I'm not satisfied with the investigation! I knew my son. He was squared away on boats."

"What then? You think somebody killed him?"

Bigelow nodded. "I can't imagine who, or why, but yes, I do." He gave me a steady look. "I know how that sounds, but I'm not going to rest until someone takes a hard look at this."

"All right. I'll look into it, but you should understand from the start that there's a good chance I won't turn up anything new." He gave me a bleak look and I could see the pain and fatigue of the last few weeks in his face.

"Step at a time, Stubblefield. I checked on you. The scuttlebutt is that you're good, you're tough, and you're tenacious."

He found an envelope. "Check for two thousand. I'd appreciate it if you'd report directly to me rather than my wife."

I drove to the local branch of my bank and deposited Bigelow's check. Then I had lunch at a pretentious little eatery called the Happy Mandible while I considered the man's faith in his son. It was, apparently, unshakable. Still, I was not comfortable with the prospect of taking a man's money in what was almost certainly a lost cause.

Finally I decided that I'd look around for a couple of days and if nothing came of it I'd return the balance of Bigelow's retainer and let him find someone else to tilt at these particular windmills.

**R**uger was staying at his summer cottage for a couple of weeks. I called, hoping that Saturday would find him in the leisure mode. He was less than overjoyed when I told him who I was and what I wanted, but he reluctantly agreed to see me.

The "cottage" was a sprawling two story affair off Gunning Point Road. Lilacs and Russian olives framed a broad expanse of lawn that sloped down to the rocky beach of Buzzards Bay.

Paths wandered off through tall locusts to various out-buildings.

Ruger had made his money in real estate. The last building boom on the Cape had enriched him to the point that he could pursue a long-held ambition: to run for public office. The political machinery was already cranked up, dinning the voters with the skull-flattening clichés that characterize every political endeavor.

I tuned it all out years ago. Politicians, as William Blake said, seem to me to be something other than human life.

I was met on the lawn by a brittle middle-aged woman who looked like she'd lost a decision to Jim Beam the night before. She scanned me up and down with a hungry look I'd seen once or twice before.

"You the private eye?"

"That's me."

"I'm Nadine Ruger. Come on, I'll take you to the future senator." She made no attempt to conceal the disdain in her voice.

"You don't sound particularly enthusiastic about your husband's political aspirations, Mrs. Ruger."

"Nadine, please. And no, I'm not. Have you any conception of what a politician's wife has to endure? No, of course you don't. Are you married?" I said

I wasn't. "Aaah," was all she said until we reached Ruger's den.

"Good luck." She touched me lightly on the arm and then she was gone.

Daryl Ruger was a big man, but out of shape. A college line-man gone to seed. He stood up when I came in, but he didn't offer to shake hands. The look on his face made it clear that I was about as welcome as Madeline Murray O'Hair at a prayer breakfast.

"I'm afraid I don't have a lot of time, Mr. Stubblefield, so if you'll ask your questions—"

I immediately disliked the man. Maybe it was his tone of voice, or his jowly face and blow-dry hair. Perhaps it was the fact that his idea of progress was to make the whole country look like New Jersey. Maybe it was all of the above.

"I'll be as brief as possible, Mr. Ruger. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary about Robbie Bigelow the night of the party?"

"Like what?"

"Did he have an altercation with anyone, for instance?"

"Not that I saw."

"He seemed normal, having a good time?"

"There were forty or fifty kids here that night. I wasn't paying particular attention to any of them, including Robbie."



"Was he drinking?"

"Drinking? We didn't provide alcohol. These are high school kids, for chrissake. What kind of question is that?"

"It's a necessary question. If the Bigelow boy forgot to vent his bilges, maybe it was because he was high."

"What do you mean, 'if' he forgot? That must be what happened."

"His father doesn't think so."

Ruger made a dismissive gesture. "Walter is devastated. He's not thinking clearly. As to booze, it's possible that some of the kids might have brought their own. I wouldn't know." He glanced at his watch.

I looked around the room. The walls were lined with photographs of the family sailing, playing croquet, relentlessly smiling. One showed Ruger's daughter blowing out candles on a birthday cake.

"Would you mind if I talked with your daughter? If Robbie was having problems she, or one of her friends, might be aware of it."

Ruger's face hardened, and he jabbed a fleshy forefinger at me.

"You're damned right I'd mind! Now you listen up, mister. I feel deeply for the Bigelows. They've suffered a terrible loss. But it was an accident. Period. You're not going to

bother my daughter or my wife or me any further, you understand?" He caught himself and struggled to adopt a more reasonable tone.

"Look, Stubblefield. This is a touchy point in my career. You may know that I'm making a run on the Senate. How the hell is it going to look if the papers get ahold of the fact that a private investigator is snooping around, questioning members of my family? Even the suggestion of foul play—I can't afford that, you see what I mean?"

"Yeah. And my client sees an empty chair at the dinner table every night, and he wants to know why. I'm sorry if my questions irritate you, Ruger, but that's what I'm paid to do."

Ruger walked around behind his desk. "This interview is over. I'm sure you can find your way out."

There was nothing more to be said. I headed for the door.

"Stubblefield."

I turned back. Ruger's eyes were slits.

"Stay away from my daughter."

It was only two o'clock. So far I'd managed to accept what appeared to be a hopeless case, and alienate one of the county heavyweights as well. I was on a roll. What the hell, why not try for a sweep and go rile up

the dead girl's parents while I was at it.

The Brocks could add nothing to what I already knew. Cheryl had been Carmela Ruger's classmate, as was nearly everyone else at the party that night. She and Robbie had been dating steadily for over a year. It was a terrible tragedy, said Mrs. Brock. Her husband nodded in agreement, but the look on his face made it clear that he blamed Robbie Bigelow for the death of his daughter.

Sunday arrived bearing a blustery nor'easter. Rain slapped the windows, and the boats in the harbor rode uneasily on their moorings.

I ate in, and then settled down with *A Distant Mirror*, Barbara Tuchman's history of the fourteenth century. It had been a tumultuous era marked by pestilence, persecution, and war. The English killed the French, the French killed the Turks, and the Black Death, showing no bias at all, killed everyone who got in its way.

During a break in the rain I went out for the paper. The names and the places were different, but if you substituted AIDS for the bubonic plague and assault rifles for the longbow, the text was basically the same. The story of the sword.

\* \* \*

The rain had stopped when I got up on Monday, but the clouds were low and oppressive. Except for an occasional tern, the birds showed no inclination to go aloft.

I walked to the Rudder for breakfast, then retrieved my car and headed for Falmouth. I wanted to speak with Robbie Bigelow's karate sensei and then, whether Ruger liked it or not, I was going to attempt an interview with his daughter. As far as I was concerned, that would be the end of the line. I'd have spent a few hundred dollars of Bigelow's money, incurred the wrath of several citizens, and accomplished virtually nothing else.

Willie Kim was holding a class when I arrived. I removed my shoes, bowed, and took a seat on the hardwood floor.

Willie is in his fifties, short, powerfully built, and one of the finest martial artists I know. He fought the North Koreans when he was young, then emigrated to the States and opened a tae kwon dô school. He's been at it ever since.

When class was over, Willie crossed the room and we bowed.

"Charles. It is good to see you. You come to work out?"

"Actually, I want to ask about one of your students, Robbie Bigelow."

Willie stroked his chin. The first two knuckles of his hand were enlarged and calloused. "Very sad what happened. A nice boy. He showed much promise."

"Was he having a problem with anyone?"

"Problem? No, there was no problem. Robbie was well-liked."

"Any sign of drugs or alcohol?"

"No, no. I saw nothing myself, and that would be hard to conceal here. The boy was clear-eyed, focused. Why these questions, Charles?"

I shrugged.

"His father wants to be sure, that's all."

Willie removed his hachimaki, the cloth headband that kept his straight black hair out of his eyes. "You know the saying, that you can paint a picture of a tiger's skin, but not of his bones?"

I nodded.

"Same with a man: you may know his face, but not his heart. I have described Robbie's face. I can only guess at his heart. But—I believe it was good."

Traffic was light on Route 28 as I headed for the Bourne bridge. The Croft School was off-Cape, east of Fairhaven and directly across Buzzards Bay

from both Ruger and Bigelow. I didn't have a plan. I hadn't called ahead. Improvisation time.

I almost didn't notice the white Buick that fell in behind me. No question, though, about the gray Chevy that barreled past a minute later and slotted itself in front of me. No sooner was he in place than a dark blue convertible swung out to pass our little procession. The driver was wearing a yellow scarf to keep her hair down and a large pair of sunglasses. She pulled up even with me, flashed a brilliant smile, and blew me a kiss. Then I couldn't see her any more.

He'd been slumped down in the passenger seat. Now suddenly he sat up, swiveled toward me, mirrored glasses glinting in the sun, and brought the shotgun to his shoulder.

Normal thought processes are suspended at times like that, at least they are for me. The mind lets go, and the body takes over. Through the years I've learned to trust the body's wisdom.

I stomped the brakes hard. The shotgun blast took out the right side of the windshield, filling the cockpit with flying bits of safety glass. I yanked the wheel to the right and accelerated across the shoulder of

the road and onto the grass apron.

The second blast blew out the rear window, and then I was slewing around on pine needles and soft soil, trying to avoid the trees. Luck was with me. I gained about forty or fifty yards before the trees closed in and made driving impossible. I threw open the door and started running, my only thought to get as much timber between myself and the shotgun as I could.

About two hundred yards farther in, I stopped and listened for pursuit. The only sounds were the wind in the pines and a squirrel chiding me for my intrusion. Then the revving of engines as my assailants left the scene, tires chirping against the asphalt.

I sat down and forced myself to wait for fifteen minutes before taking a circuitous route through the woods and back to the car. There's a bumper sticker that says "It's better to have a gun and not need it, than to need a gun and not have it." I don't think I have an unhealthy emotional attachment to guns, but I'd have given a lot to have my Browning in hand as I crept up on the Toyota.

The door was still open, the motor still running, and there was no one in sight. I managed

to back up as far as the shoulder when the cops appeared, guns drawn. I was almost glad to see them.

Chief Richard Farrell, Falmouth P.D., slid my license across the desk. He puffed out his cheeks and let the air out all at once.

"All right. Eddie Olivera verifies your I.D. He also says you're a royal pain in the ass."

"Gee, and I've always spoken so well of him."

Farrell leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head. "I'm going to tell you right now that I don't have any use for amateurs. Most of them are wannabe cops, night watchmen with exalted ideas, or freaks who've read too much Mickey Spillane. "Eddie says you're okay. Maybe you are. But I want to know what you're up to. I've heard your name once already today."

"That right? Who from?"

"Daryl Ruger, and he's not one of your fans. I don't have to tell you that he ranks among the mighty down here."

"That why the investigation of Robbie Bigelow's death was closed so quickly?"

Farrell's lips tightened. "I resent that crack, friend. The investigation yielded no evidence to suggest anything other than

an accident. *That's* why it was closed. I'd prefer that it remain that way, unless you can come up with some strong persuaders why we should take another look. I'm betting you won't."

"You know the boy's father," I said. "He strike you as being paranoid?"

"He strikes me as a grieving parent, trying to make sense out of something that's—well, senseless."

"And then there's my car."

"Tell you what, Stubblefield. I figure a guy like you makes a lot of enemies. Maybe one of them decided to settle up."

"Sure," I said. "It's just a coincidence that the third day I'm on a case some greasebag with a shotgun tries to blow my head off." I got up to leave. "I've got some questions to ask. I'll do it as quickly and as politely as I know how."

Farrell glared at me.

"I hear any complaints, I'll escort you to the town line. Personally. And Stubblefield: you get even one-tenth of one doubt about the Bigelow kid's death being an accident—with some proof to back it up—don't be playing cop. You let me know."

**I** made arrangements to have my car towed to a nearby garage. The owner glanced at it, mumbled

something about cars so decrepit that the only thing holding them together was the paint, and said he'd replace the glass, but no warranty due to "excessive corrosion." He also gave me a lift to a car rental outfit, and an hour later I was opening my office door.

The mail consisted of the usual unrelenting attempts to separate me from my money: the ACLU, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the local animal shelter, the NRA. I canned the lot of it, unlocked the bottom drawer of the desk, and got out my Browning. While I was at it, I grabbed the Smith & Wesson Model 36, a little trouble gun that had made the difference more than once.

Like Bigelow, I'd been on sailboats since I was a kid. But all my knowledge of powerboats would fit in a flea's ear with enough room left over for a banker's heart. I needed a professional opinion. That meant a visit with Raymond Tarbox.

Beale's Boatyard had so far held out against the developers—the ground hogs, as Sam Beale called them. Rising taxes had forced many boatyards and sail lofts out of business. They were being replaced by condo complexes and upscale housing tracts with names like Spinna-

ker Estates, or Seaspray, or Shearwater. The tenants were older, richer, didn't know a spinnaker from a staysail, and sure as hell didn't want anything as gritty as a boatyard in their neighborhood anyway. What they did want was bigger and better roads, more services, and lots of places to spend their money. Oldtimers like Sam Beale and Ray Tarbox despised them.

Ray was caulking a trawler, his live oak mallet ringing out with each stroke. He was a short, wiry man who'd fought in the Second World War and had the medals and the tattoos to prove it. Ray was knocking on seventy now, but he could build a boat from keel to mast truck, repair an engine, straighten a bent wheel, and probably restitch a sail if someone asked him properly. I waited until he reached the end of the seam and asked my question.

"Ray, if you wanted to blow someone up in his powerboat without using any outside devices, could you do it?"

He produced a huge red bandanna with white polka dots and wiped the sweat off his face.

"This a theoretical question, Charles, or a practical matter?"

"You remember last month, the Bigelow kid down Fal-

mouth way?" He nodded.

"I've worked on that boat. Old Chris Craft, twenty-three-foot Sea Skiff, lapstrake model. The boy's father owned it." He took a drink of water. Beyond the trawler, at water's edge, shorebirds ran back and forth like little clockwork toys. A fishing boat rounded Dunbar Point and headed in, trailing a cloud of gulls. I waited. Raymond is a deliberate man.

"The boat was fitted with a blower," he said. "The boy failed to vent the bilge."

"His father doesn't think so. He thinks somebody killed the kid."

Raymond chewed on that for a minute.

"What do you think?" he said finally.

"I'm beginning to think there might be something to it."

"I see." He sat down on a milk crate and studied the boats plying the waters of Lewis Bay. Then he nodded.

"It could be done. You could back off a gas line fitting, let some fuel into the bilge, put the hot wire against the block. When the blower motor was turned on, there'd be a spark." He took another drink. "It's not certain she'd blow, but it's quite likely she would. You figure that's what happened?"

"I don't know. I just needed to find out if it could be done.

How long would it take to do this?"

"Not long. A few minutes." He got up, spit, and picked up his mallet and oakum.

I don't place too much importance on coincidence. After all, if you stop the first twenty-three people getting off a bus, there's a fifty-fifty chance that two of them will share the same birthday. Coincidences are fairly common.

But Farrell was wrong. The attempt on my life was no coincidence. I'd touched a nerve somewhere, and all of a sudden Robbie Bigelow's death didn't look like an accident any more.

I drove back out to Bigelow's house. A few minutes later we were seated in the same wicker furniture, fending off the dogs. A huge motor yacht worked its way slowly up the bay towards the canal. I wondered briefly about the owner, who he was and how he'd accumulated so much money. I figured there'd be no captain's hat with gold trim for him. A guy with a boat that big probably walks the decks with a crown and scepter.

"Okay," I said when the dogs finally settled down. "I think maybe you're right." Bigelow leaned forward, eyes glistening.

"What's happened?"

"Some people tried to punch

my ticket today. Chief Farrell thinks it was unrelated to my current inquiries. I think otherwise."

Bigelow sat back. "I knew it," was all he said.

"I need to talk with some of Robbie's friends, someone who might know who had a reason to kill him. So far I've drawn a blank." An idea was nagging at the back of my brain, but I couldn't quite get a grip on it.

"I can give you a list of his friends, but honest to God, Stubblefield, I can't conceive of anyone who would want to kill Robbie."

And then that vagrant thought snapped into focus, sharp and clear.

I took the list that Bigelow wrote out and headed for the bridge again.

**T**he Croft School was everything that my high school wasn't: verdant, spacious, safe. Several of the brick buildings had ivy on them. Groups of adolescent boys and girls came and went, their arms full of books. The football team was running drills. A group of girls was practicing archery on what Crofters probably called the Greensward.

The Chinese have a saying: when the finger points at the moon, the idiot looks at the



finger. I'd been approaching the case from the wrong angle. Walter Bigelow was certain that someone had murdered his son, and that was the premise I'd been working on. It hadn't occurred to either of us that Robbie's girlfriend, Cheryl Brock, might have been the target.

On the face of it, that was as improbable as someone's wanting Robbie dead. I could easily imagine a jealous suitor, but teenagers rarely murder each other over unrequited love.

I'd come dressed for the occasion: new jeans, blue oxford shirt, tan corduroy sport jacket with leather elbow patches. Stubblefield, master of assimilation. Thus armored, I walked over to the half-dozen girls on the archery range.

"Hi," I said, flashing my best smile. "I'm trying to locate Carmela Ruger." Often, if you act like you're legitimate, people will just assume that you are legitimate. Not this time. The girls looked at each other. One giggled. Behind them, a very large sweatsuited man on the football field was watching us.

"Who are you?" asked one girl.

"I'm an investigator. I just want to check a couple of things with Miss Ruger." The coach laid down his clipboard and whistle and started toward us.

"An investigator? Like Magnum?"

"That's it."

One of the other girls stepped forward, a petite brunette with a solemn look about her.

"You're here about Robbie and Cheryl, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. How did you know?"

"I didn't know, or rather I wasn't sure. But it seems like such a coincidence."

"What does?" The coach was about fifty yards away. I put my hands in my pockets and tried to look harmless. Maybe I should have included glasses with my wardrobe.

"Carmela's mother drove down and took her home last night. Some kind of family problem, she said." The coach was closing fast. I didn't have much time.

"Were you a friend of Cheryl's?" She nodded. "I need to talk with someone who knew Cheryl or Robbie well."

A funny look crossed her face. "I don't believe this. You're—" She checked herself, glancing at the other girls. Then she shouldered her bow and walked right by me just as the coach arrived. As she passed, she said in a low voice, "The Lighthouse, one hour."

And then Baby Huey was standing two feet in front of me, blocking out the sun.

"Something I can help you with, buddy?"

"Probably not. Golf's my game."

He nodded heavily and gave me his best pit bull stare. Over his shoulder he said, "You girls run along now." After they had gone, he turned his full attention to me.

"All right, mister. You got business on campus, you got to check in at the office." He nodded at one of the brick buildings. "If you don't have business, then I figure I can deal with that."

He was like every football player I'd ever known, heavy on the intimidation. They all make the mistake of equating size with competence. They pump up with weights until they can't clap their hands together over their heads or run ten yards without popping a hamstring. You could give most of them an enema and bury the remains in a shoebox.

Baby Huey was big but not very bright. He was standing full-front to me, legs apart, arms akimbo, and well within striking distance. I could have crippled or killed him in three seconds: virtually every vital target area was exposed. Instead I tried on my smile again.

"Sure, the office. I should have thought of that but, you know, I was trying to save some

time. That the office over there?"

I started off. He came right along with me.

"You're not a recruiter, are you?"

"Actually, I'm a consultant for Chancre and Blain."

"Who're they?"

"A pharmaceutical company. They want to find out why, at schools like Croft, there never seems to be a good case of acne. Marketing research, you see. We want to break it down: socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, diet, that sort of thing." I shook my head sadly. "You should see some of those kids in the city schools."

Baby Huey gazed at me as if I were an alien life form but didn't offer any more conversation and disappeared after escorting me into the sanctum of L. Jason Dolbear.

The headmaster of the Croft School was the antithesis of Baby Huey: ascetically thin, sparse gray hair, horn-rimmed glasses, blazer bearing the school emblem—an open book surrounded by the circular inscription "Qui docet discit." He who teaches learns. Dolbear also possessed sparkling, intelligent eyes.

"Chancre and Blain," he said, shaking his head. A smile appeared at the corners of his mouth. "That's quite droll. And

now may I ask who you really are?"

I slid my license and business card across the desk.

"Charles Stubblefield. Just so. Mr. Ruger warned me that you might be by. You've caused the Rugers more than a little inconvenience. Can you provide a good reason for this intrusion?"

"I'm looking into a matter for a client. I simply wanted to ask the Ruger girl a few questions."

"You know how things are done. Why did you not come to me first and ask permission?"

"Would you have let me see her?"

Dolbear shrugged. "Carmela's parents have removed her from school temporarily." He made minute adjustments to a book until its edges were precisely aligned with the corner of the desk. The sounds of youthful laughter filtered through the mullioned windows and burgundy drapes.

"Your client is Walter Bigelow. He also called and asked that I offer you every consideration. Unfortunately, that is not possible. Without actually sequestering our students, we do attempt to shield them from—outside distractions or unpleasantness. I'm sure you understand."

"I understand very well, Mr. Dolbear," I said, getting up.

"I'll be on my way."

"Do you believe that someone actually murdered those children?"

"I don't know. It's possible."

"What kind of society are we living in?"

There wasn't a short answer for that. I closed the door gently on my way out.

The Lighthouse turned out to be not an aid to navigation but a soda fountain and sandwich place half a mile off campus. At four thirty it was jammed with Croft students. There appeared to be nobody in the place, help included, over the age of eighteen. The little brunette appeared and led me to a booth. She was nothing if not direct.

"If you're here because of Robbie and Cheryl, that means there must be something suspicious about the way they died, right?"

"Not 'must be,' just 'may be.'"

She looked past me for a minute, thinking. Then she seemed to make up her mind about something.

"I really don't want to get involved, but I'll tell you what I know. Cheryl *was* my friend." She fidgeted with a paper napkin. "There are these rumors. You know, really gross stuff." She squirmed a little. "Mr. Ruger was down here a lot, to visit

Carmela, and to conduct his business—some shopping center or something he was building near New Bedford.” She squirmed some more.

“Go on,” I said.

“Well, a couple of the kids supposedly saw Darcy White getting out of Mr. Ruger’s car one night. It was real late, after curfew. And she was really stoned. They were breaking curfew, too, so they helped Darcy sneak back into the dorm.”

“Was Darcy at the party?”

“Yes.”

“The two kids who spotted Darcy and Ruger: did Ruger see them?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

“What do you think Darcy’s relationship with Ruger was, or is?”

“Are you kidding? What do you think?”

“I don’t know Darcy.”

“She’s wild. She loves to party. I don’t know how she keeps her grade point average up, but she does. Anyway, that’s all I know. Does it help?”

“Yes, I think it does.”

“You promised. I want to stay out of this. It really scares me that someone might have killed Cheryl.”

“You’re out of it. I don’t even know your name, remember?”

She smiled.

“That’s right. You don’t.”

**I**t was getting dark when I pulled off Gunning Point Road and parked in Ruger’s driveway. There were lights on in the house. I started across the lawn.

“Hold it right there, schmucko. Hands on your head, lace your fingers.”

I did as I was told. They came out of the shadows by the garage. One pointed a shotgun at me while the other removed the Browning from its shoulder holster. He checked my pockets and patted down my legs, too, but he was careless. He missed the .38. It was tucked under my belt in the small of my back, hidden by my jacket. He grinned and slapped me across the face, hard.

“Hey, Richie. Hear that? The sound of one hand slapping.” He laughed and hit me again.

“You’re trespassing, pal. We could take you out right now, no problem.”

“You do that again,” I said, “and I’ll break your arm.”

“Later for that,” said the squat man with the shotgun. “Ruger wants to see him. Let’s go.”

They walked me up to the house and into the study by way of a double door that let onto the porch.

Ruger was sitting at his

desk. There was a bottle of Chivas and a glass nearby. My gun was deposited on the desk, and Ruger nodded to the two bodyguards. They left the way we'd come. Ruger picked up the Browning and played with it carelessly.

"I told you to stay away from my daughter. I warned you to keep your nose out of my business."

"You should hire better help," I said. "Your gunner screwed up this morning."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yeah, you do. What's your relationship with Darcy White all about? Sex and drugs, or just sex? Or maybe you're just helping her with her homework."

Ruger stiffened. He had a good grip on the gun now.

"You son of a bitch." His voice was a raw whisper. "I'll kill you for that."

"It's an old story, Ruger. You're led around by your libido. Trouble is, Darcy's only what—seventeen? Doesn't look so good on the old résumé that the prospective senator's been schtupping a minor."

"Shut up! What do you know about it? I've worked for years to get where I am. I'm not going to let this derail my plans."

"You'll have to kill me. Then you'll have to kill Darcy. And

the kids who saw you with Darcy, they'll have to go, too. You're going to be a very busy little pedophile."

Ruger sneered. "Seventeen! Only in years, my friend. Darcy's quite a bit older than seventeen."

"The courts don't see it that way. But that's small change. You're going over for Cheryl and Robbie."

Ruger's eyes looked like they were going to pop out of their sockets.

"Here's how I see it." I flapped my jacket back at the sides and put my hands on my hips. At least now I had a chance at the .38.

"Cheryl knew about you and Darcy, maybe from your trysts at Croft. You were careless enough. It's more likely that you and Darcy got together the night of the party. Where'd you meet her, down at the boat-house? Doesn't matter. What matters is that Cheryl walked in on you, didn't she? Darcy didn't see her, but you did."

Ruger barked out a laugh. "Darcy was snowblind, as usual. She didn't see anything."

"So there you were. You didn't know what Cheryl would do. Or maybe you followed her and tried to smooth it out and she didn't buy it. Either way, you panicked. All you could see

was your precious career ruined, political hopes dashed, the prospect of jail—so you killed her. The Bigelow kid had to go as well, but what the hell, as long as Daryl Ruger's reputation wasn't sullied."

The Browning was centered on my face now. Ruger's lips were drawn back from his teeth and a thin trail of saliva slid from the corner of his mouth.

"Not a bad plan, really. You fooled everybody with the explosion. If you hadn't tried to whack me, you might have gotten away with it."

Ruger had a crazed look on his face. I thought he was going to shoot me then.

"You swine! You filthy swine!" Nadine Ruger stood in the doorway. Her face was red and swollen. She stepped unsteadily into the room.

"Get out of here, Nadine!" Ruger shouted. "Get out now!"

"Oh, how could you, Daryl? A high school girl, for God's sake. At least the others were of age."

She had his attention, and I was able to palm the .38 unobserved.

"You knew? About the others?"

Nadine Ruger looked very old and very tired.

"You're a fool, Daryl."

I thumbed back the hammer and lined my sights on Ruger.

"Put it down," I said. He

looked over as if noticing me for the first time. And he was empty, his past exposed, and the future looming up dark and menacing.

"No!" He jerked the gun up and I shot him through the chest a split second before the Browning roared. The combined detonation of the two guns was deafening. I flinched, expecting a bullet, but Ruger missed.

Nadine Ruger stumbled over to her husband, who lay sprawled on the bare wood floor in front of the fireplace. She sat down abruptly and began to weep.

"Okay," said Farrell. "Let's review it, shall we? Ruger's going to live, but he's ruined: family destroyed, reputation shot, political career—hell, forget that."

"Farrell, he killed those kids."

"You say. All right, I figure he did, too, but we'll never be able to prove it to a jury's satisfaction, and you know it." He got up and pulled the blinds. The sharp morning sunlight shrank to a few thin bars on the desk.

"Bigelow's all pumped up. He wants to know why we're not strapping Ruger into the chair

this morning." The phone rang once and stopped. Farrell ignored it.

"Ditto the Brock family. Christ, last week old man Brock was ready to dig Robbie Bigelow up and kill him again. Now he's screaming for Ruger's blood.

"Then there's the White girl. God knows what she's going through, never mind the Croft School. Private schools just love a scandal, don't they." He glared at me. I could see a spot where he'd nicked himself shaving that morning.

"So what the hell did you accomplish here? Tell me, please."

"I found the truth," I said.

"A fat lot of good it's going to do. You're the only one comes out looking all right. Mrs. Ru-

ger made it clear that you shot her husband in self-defense." He closed the folder on his desk and stared at it.

"Go home, Stubblefield. Go the hell home."

It rained for a week. There weren't any clients. I used the time to finish reading up on the fourteenth century.

Tuchman's summation was somber: "Violence threw off restraints. It was a time of default. Rules crumbled, institutions failed in their functions. Knighthood did not protect."

Farrell was right. No one was happy with the way things came out. Maybe it's never a good time to be a knight. Or maybe nothing can really keep the lid on evil for very long.

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*(continued from page 4)*

Shoal Creek" by Michael Maschinot, a Georgian. He has also written plays and short stories and is particularly interested in writing for young people. He works in adminis-

tration at a center for the rehabilitation of the blind and has previously tried his hand at everything from truck driver to hospital technician, actor, computer repairman, and accounting clerk.



MYSTERY CLASSIC

# One-Way Street

by Anthony Armstrong



If it hadn't been for little Mr. Harold Bent's being apparently oblivious of the fact that the Trafalgar Square traffic went one way round only, the body of James Wellson would have been discovered five minutes later than it was. It would also have been discovered half a mile away from where it was. And even an extra five minutes and an extra half mile can, of course, be extremely useful to a murderer, particularly in London.

It happened like this:

Released by the traffic lights, George Travers, taxi driver, swung his cab round the southeast corner of Trafalgar Square and, mingling with the Whitehall stream in the usual crisscross, dodge-as-dodge-can, made for the Pall Mall destination of his fare. As was his custom in all such traffic maelstroms, he kept up under his breath a running fire of malediction against vehicles cutting across him, vehicles which objected to his cutting across them, and above all pedestrians who seemed sublimely unconscious of the fact that vehicles even existed.

As a general rule, his widely aimed obloquy was automatic and largely unnecessary, but suddenly it seemed for once justified. For as he reached the next corner a man, the above-mentioned Mr. Harold Bent, stepped off the central pavement and, narrowly missing a couple of cars, started across in front of George's taxi with his head turned the other way.

George immediately and indignantly squeezed his horn bulb to produce the two cracked and protesting squawks which should freeze the other to startled immobility while he rattled past; but for once it did not work. Instead of stopping in his tracks the pedestrian leaped wildly forward.

George swung his wheel with a blistering oath—too late. The taxi's wing caught the other above the left knee. His hat went flying in one direction, while the mackintosh he had been carrying spreadeagled itself in another, frightening the life out of George, who momentarily thought it was the body.

"—! First—accident in eighteen—years!" he ejaculated, scared and furious, as his taxi screeched to a standstill within a few yards. Next minute, however, he realized to his relief that the pedestrian, instead of lying bleeding to death in the road, had already scrambled up from the greasy wood paving and, having received his hat from one bystander and his coat from another, was limping angrily towards him. George's relief, however, was almost at once swallowed up in a vast indignation, for the other's furiously expressed

idea seemed to be that it was all George's fault for driving on the wrong side of the road.

"Wrong side of the road!" he spluttered. "In Trafalgar Square there's only one—side of the road. Why, you . . ."

But Mr. Harold Bent was not listening to him. He broke off and turned round. "Here!" he said abruptly to George. "What's up with your passenger? He's ill or something."

The gathering crowd surged forward to peer inside at the hunched figure of a fattish, dark young man, who had fallen forward off the seat and was now collapsed on the floor.

"Thrown forward and stunned 'isself!" volunteered the large stolid man, knowledgeably inactive.

"Attack o' powmain poisoning?" suggested the man with the muffler hopefully, also doing nothing at all about it.

"Maybe he's only fainted from shock," put in Mr. Harold Bent crisply. "Loosen his collar or something. . . ."

But by then a policeman had plowed through the crowd and taken charge. He gently lifted the inert figure back onto the seat; then turned. "Anyone of you people a doctor, please?"

"Any doctor here?" spread outwards like a ripple. A moment later a tall, black-coated figure materialized in the little open space round the door. He knelt in the cab, made a brief examination, then said to the constable in an undertone: "This man is dead!"

"Cor!" said P. C. Robinson, startled out of his stolidity for a moment. "Hrm! I mean, shock o' the accident, sir? Or hit his head on . . ."

"No," replied the doctor, still in the same low, serious tones. "As far as I can see he's been stabbed—there's the hilt of a dagger under the right arm. . . ."

A week had passed and two men sat in armchairs in a small, neatly furnished suburban parlor. Pipes were going, and a quart bottle of beer stood half-empty between them. An air of relaxation and contentment hung over the scene, in spite of the fact that the younger man, Inspector Painton, looked worried.

"I'm not happy about it, Dad," he said, chewing on his pipestem. "Here's this chap, James Wellson, stabbed to death about midday in the busiest part of London, a quarter of a mile from Scotland Yard, and we're still just about where we came in."

Ex-Superintendent Painton, a large man who seemed to be built on the lines of a floating dock, grinned over all his chins. "And

though, as old Osborn said, you're one of our most promising young detective-inspectors, you nevertheless want to talk it out, as usual, with your old father, who's now on the shelf."

"Why you ever retired I . . ."

His father waved him to silence. "Let's talk it over by all means. It does this so-called clear-thinking brain of mine good to tackle a murder problem again—so get going. I've followed fairly closely all that's got into the papers, of course."

His son's face brightened a little, and he took some papers from his pocket. "Good. Now, as I expect you know, the taxi driver's statement—without the blasphemy, which cuts it down by forty percent—is that he was hailed about noon outside a pub near Oxford Circus by the murdered man. He didn't notice the man's companion particularly at that time—he had his back to him and got in quickly—except that he was short and wore a light raincoat, but no hat. Wellson—that's the murdered man—gave the directions—a destination in Pall Mall—but told the driver that his friend wanted to get off first at the southeast corner of Trafalgar Square. So he drives down Regent Street and Haymarket, and turns left for Trafalgar Square, but just as he gets to the near end of the National Gallery the murderer raps on the glass and wants to get out. He's told that this is the northwest corner, the southeast is at Charing Cross, diagonally opposite. He retorts that this is the corner he meant, and out he gets."

"So this is the first time the taxi driver hears his voice? Don't mind my interrupting, boy: I'm just getting the picture."

"That's okay. . . . Yes, and he says he had a husky voice, as though he had a very bad throat. It's the first time, too, he sees his face and notices he has a small black mustache. Also he's wearing brown gloves."

"So you found no helpful fingerprints on the door handle, hilt of weapon, or elsewhere?"

"Quite right. Well, he tells the driver to carry on to Pall Mall, calls out 'So long' to his companion inside . . ."

"Who didn't answer, of course?"

"No. For by then obviously he was already dead, but probably propped up in the corner to look natural."

The elder man refilled his glass and then stretched his enormous body out more comfortably, as if to give his mind more scope. "What's your idea, son, about why he got out at that particular place?"

"Because he'd done the job."

Here his father nodded slowly to himself three or four times.

"He didn't want to stick around with the body any longer than he had to. He was right, too; because in point of fact it was only a few minutes afterwards that Wellson's body was prematurely discovered through a quite unforeseen accident. Not that it helps. Our murderer, a small man with a mustache—certainly shaved off by now—and a husky voice, probably a disguised one, is at large in London, and we've no clue at all."

"What about the weapon?"

"No help. One of those thin steel paper knives, such as might have been bought anywhere and sharpened to a keen point. Used with skill, of course."

The ex-superintendent grunted, busied himself with refilling his pipe, then asked: "No clues from the Wellson end of the business?"

"Nope. The taxi's destination was only the corner of Pall Mall and St. James's Street—nothing to pick up there—while at the Oxford Circus pub all we've got is a barman who thinks he remembers him and that he was having a drink with a short man. But the place was very full and he was too busy to notice much. He says, however, that this other fellow, whoever he was, had no mustache, hadn't got a raincoat, and anyway, Wellson left the pub alone."

"What about Wellson's background?"

"Not much to find out. He was unmarried and lived in rooms in Hampstead. Out all day—worked in an engineering firm. Lots of pub friends, but no definite enemies at this time. Unfortunately for us, though, he had too many potential enemies from the past."

"Meaning?"

"Well, he was a nasty bit of work—been reserved all the war on a sort of traveling inspector's job and specialized in playing about with wives in the various towns he visited, generally those whose husbands were away in the services. Almost any wronged husband, therefore, may have had it in for him—*when* he discovered, which may not have been till he came home, some good while after Wellson's association ceased. Naturally it's almost impossible to check up on all these women—different towns over five years or so—particularly when he no doubt kept his affairs as secret as possible."

"Hmf!" went the elder man, in a baffled sort of way, and drank some beer. "You *have* got something to chew on, Jack, haven't you?"

"And even that motive's only guesswork—though I've checked

Wellson's background pretty carefully and can't find another as likely."

"It's probably the right one. As a starting point, let's assume it is. Okay? . . . Right! The murderer has only recently discovered that Wellson was his wife's seducer at some time or another, and is all out for the biggest sort of revenge. Now what? Did Wellson know who he was?"

"No," said the inspector definitely. "Or he'd have avoided him for a cert. Yet he knew him sufficiently well to give him a lift in his cab some distance out of his direct route to Pall Mall. So it wasn't a chance taxi-sharing."

"Good point," agreed his father.

"So the other must have deliberately scraped up an acquaintance—object: murder. But—" and his face clouded "—*why* is it that we can't pick up any hint of their having been seen together at any time prior to the murder. We know all Wellson's haunts."

"Ah!" Ex-Superintendent Painton swallowed some more beer. "This at last is where I think," he announced portentously, and closed his eyes. . . .

After ten minutes he opened them and emptied his glass. "I'm getting something, Jack," he said. "Hrm! You've made two false assumptions. . . ."

"Hey, steady, Dad!" cried the other, nettled. "You make me sound like a dumb flattie, not C.I.D."

"When you've been as long in the game as I have," began his father. "However . . . you assumed, correctly, that the murderer adopted a false voice to deceive the taxi driver. But in the same breath, my boy, you assumed that his appearance—i.e. the mustache—was *real*. Why shouldn't that have been false, too? In other words, though most criminals commit a crime and then 'disappear' by altering their appearance, may we not have one here who changed his appearance solely for the crime? In other words, the murderer, as seen by the only witness, not only 'disappeared' after the crime, but never existed before it."

Jack Painton was forced to admit his father had got something there. "Which accounts for our finding no trace of Wellson ever being associated with a man with a mustache. . . . Wait! But surely the murderer wouldn't have suddenly put on a mustache to go in a taxi with a fellow who knew him otherwise?"

The elder man smiled tolerantly. "Oh, he didn't do that till after he'd killed him. In the taxi. Nor did he use his disguised voice till

afterwards either. Remember, he got in quickly and the driver never heard him speak or saw his face till he . . .”

“I get it,” said his son, with a touch of annoyance. “What you mean is that the man we’ve got to find is a chap associated with Wellson before his death, who wasn’t disguising his voice nor wearing a false mustache. Easy!”

“No need to be sarcastic, Jack. At least we know he’s short—he can hardly have cut his legs down for the job—and—” he puffed complacently “—wasn’t a short man talking to Wellson in that Oxford Circus pub?”

“Ye-es. But he hadn’t a raincoat, and he didn’t leave with Wellson.”

“Be your age, Jack! We’re obviously dealing with a clever man. The pub was crowded, and you don’t notice everything in a crowd. Why shouldn’t he have had his raincoat on a seat where the barman couldn’t see it, and then put it on and left quickly when the fellow wasn’t looking—but in plenty of time to catch his victim before he got a taxi? It’s a hundred to one against his finding one waiting outside.”

Inspector Painton considered a moment, then his face brightened. “You know, Dad, I believe that may be about the size of it. That brain of yours is still pretty clear. I’ll get round to the pub myself first thing tomorrow, as a further check. . . . By the way, didn’t you say I’d made another false assumption?”

“Oh yes. You assumed that the murderer got out at that corner of Trafalgar Square because he’d just done the job. It doesn’t ring true to me.”

“Why not? What’s on that clear-thinking mind of yours now?”

“I don’t know,” said the ex-superintendent simply. “Give me time. And get me another bottle of beer. Don’t bother about my mind yet: I’ve got a big frame to support.”

After a long draught and five minutes’ silence with closed eyes, he again stirred ponderously to life. “Yes,” he said. “Yes.”

“Spill it, you old has-been,” grinned his son.

“Here’s the fallacy. It wouldn’t take long to do the job, and the natural thing would have been to ask to be stopped anywhere he fancied on the direct route to Pall Mall. But he wants a corner of Trafalgar Square which is out of the way. Why? And he makes a mistake in the corner. Now! Was it a mistake?”

“Why not? Not everyone’s certain of north and south and so on in London.”



"All the same, supposing he *had* correctly specified the corner he wanted at the start. It's only a quarter of a minute's walk from the bottom of Haymarket. The obvious thing, therefore, would be to drop him there, and the taxi could at once turn right and go along Pall Mall. But, asking for the southeast corner means it's got to go all round two sides of the square to drop him and then come back along the third side, because Trafalgar Square is one-way. It looks, in fact, as though he wanted it to go right round and yet wanted to get . . . By God!" He heaved his vast bulk almost upright. "What a stroke of genius!"

"What is? What?" His son jumped to his feet in his excitement. "Do you think you've got it?"

"It's all Scotland Yard to a pickpocket I have," he rumbled in heavy triumph. "This murderer is a very bold man—killing a chap in a taxi in broad daylight proves it—but if my theory is right, his next move tops even that for audacity. Listen! He's foreseen that we might get onto his disguise and start looking for him as the real person, who existed before and after. So, ignoring what we could find out about him before, he's taken terrific care not to be suspected *after*."

"How?"

"Who of the persons actually connected with the case do you suspect least?"

Jack Painton thought. "Myself," he said with a smile, "if that's what you mean?"

"That's right. Go on!"

"Well, the taxi driver, the doctor, P. C. Robinson, who discovered the body, the . . ."

"Did the P. C. discover it?"

"Oh, no. The little bloke—what's his name, Harold Bent, who was run over, of course. . . ."

"And *there* you have him," chuckled his father. "Who *could* suspect the man who, by entire accident, discovered the body in front of a score of witnesses and was nearly killed himself into the bargain?"

"Well, I'm . . . but how?"

"Listen!" He spoke in short, triumphant chuckling bursts. "He was the short bloke in the pub: he nips out, putting his raincoat on, and gets his lift, concealing his face from the driver. Does the job. Then putting his mustache and false voice on, he gets out as soon as he has committed the taxi to going round three sides of

Trafalgar Square. As it drives on, raincoat off, gloves off, mustache off, and hat on, taken from raincoat pocket. Then he nips down the fourth side of the square in plenty of time to involve himself in a deliberate accident with the taxi he's just left. He has only fifty yards to go, while the taxi has three sides of the square to do, to say nothing of a probable holdup at one or other of the traffic lights. He waits; along it comes; he starts to cross the road. Remember, the driver said that, instead of stopping short at the horn, he seemed to jump forward. *He* didn't mind risking a broken leg—all the better proof of innocence. In short, your star witness is also your murderer."

He coughed, finished his beer, and said solemnly: "Very good deduction by one of our most promising young detective-inspectors. You'll get full marks for it."

Jack Painton rang his father up next morning. "You're right, Dad, as usual, all along," he said. "Harold Bent's wife lived in a North Country town where Wellson was in 1944. He seduced her while Bent was a P.O.W. in Burma, and she later on committed suicide in remorse, leaving a letter for her husband. After getting back, Bent spent a year trying to trace the man and only recently got onto him. Then he worked this dodge."

"Have you pulled him in, poor devil?"

"Er—no. And in a way I'm glad not to have had to do it. . . . You see, Dad, Fate's taken a hand in a queer way. Bent got run over yesterday in—of all places—Trafalgar Square, and died this morning. . . ."

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



TED WOOD

**R**eid Bennett, Ted Wood's chief of police, narrates his own series, so there is very little a reader can discover about his appearance. But Reid is rather open about his own faults and virtues, all of which make him a good cop. He was born of an English father and a French-Canadian mother; he has his mother's dark looks, and her influence has made him fluent in French as well as English. He was raised in a small mining town in the north of Canada, lost his father in a mining accident, and worked out his teenage rebellious stage by enlisting in the United States Marines and fighting in the Vietnam War. This latter activity sets him apart from many of his fellow Canadians but allowed him to get out of the mining town and into police work. As an officer on the To-

ronto police force, he got involved with a biker gang and killed two of the members. Even though the killing was justified, the period of investigation, the reaction of the press, the lack of support of his own department after a service of nine years, and a divorce that ultimately was triggered by the controversy made Reid bitter; he quit. Not that Reid isn't on good terms with his ex-wife—he actually does a side investigation for her in *Fool's Gold* (Scribners and Collins, 1986; Worldwide, 1988)—or with many of his former fellow officers on the Toronto force (he often calls on them to assist in tracing felons, for instance, something difficult to do from his one-man office which is not equipped with a state-of-the-art police lab). It's just that the urban system was one he could not work within; he is much

more comfortable on his own. When we first meet him in *Dead in the Water* (Scribners, 1983; Collins, 1984; Bantam, 1984), however, he is still a policeman, only now in Murphy's Harbor, Ontario.

Ted Wood, author, was a police officer for the Toronto police department and is familiar with the procedure that Reid must follow in order to be a one-man police force. Reid calls on the assistance of the Ontario Provincial Police when needed (and often has them, in the person of Anderson, an officer convinced that Reid is not fit to be a policeman, interfere where they aren't wanted). But it is Reid's Marine training and his basic macho nature (his girlfriend calls him "chauv") that often win the day.

As "assistants" to Reid, there are Murphy, Murphy's later replacement George, and Sam. Murphy eventually leaves the force under a cloud, but he still is a good information source for Reid regarding the town, its people, and its tourists. George is a Canadian Indian who has been admitted to law school in Toronto but who helps Reid out as a substitute whenever Reid has to leave Murphy's Harbor. Sam is the one continuing feature of Reid's life. Sam is a trained German shepherd who is strongly bonded to Reid. With Sam at his side, Reid can

track, defend himself from, and capture criminals better than any three or four officers together. And Sam is also Reid's friend. While Sam can be transferred to the handling of another with a few simple commands, when he is returned to Reid's control, there is always a welcoming that transcends the simple working relationship of canine cop and handler.

One other character is fairly well depicted in the Reid Bennett books. Freda is a gorgeous, tall, redheaded Canadian actress whom Reid rescues—and falls for—in *Murder on Ice* (Scribners, 1984; as *The Killing Cold*, Collins, 1984), has taken up with by the next book, and marries by *On the Inside* (Scribners, 1990). Freda (whom Reid calls "Fred" because she hates her given name) is understanding of the demands of Reid's job, and while she has to struggle with the danger posed to him as a policeman and to her as his girlfriend, she appears to be much more likely to stay the course with him than his ex-wife. Fred is involved in at least two of Reid's cases after their first meeting: *Corkscrew* (Scribners, 1987; Collins, 1988; Worldwide, 1989) and *On the Inside*.

The cases Reid works on reflect the nature of Murphy's Harbor, a small resort town where nothing much ever hap-

pens—kids get lost, bar fights get started, vacation homes get broken into. In *Dead in the Water*, the story starts with a search for a missing man; *Murder on Ice* is centered on a winter carnival begun in an attempt to stretch the summer tourist season into the winter months; *Corkscrew* has Reid tracing a missing child and dealing with another biker gang. The fact that all of these escalate into murder, however, poses a problem. How long would Murphy's Harbor remain a resort (and Reid its police chief) if this type of crime became commonplace? So Wood has allowed Reid vacations and undercover assignments for OPP well away from Murphy's Harbor.

*Live Bait* (Scribners, 1985; as *Dead Centre*, Collins, 1985) is where most of Reid's antipathy to Toronto becomes clear. Here, he and Sam are sent on a special assignment for a Toronto security firm, and he finds himself nose to nose with the Toronto police department. In *Fool's Gold*, he investigates the death of a geologist in the area of a major gold strike.

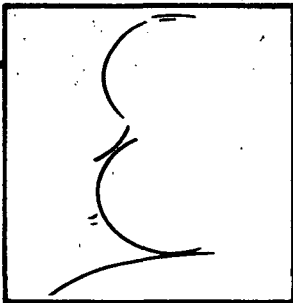
In *When the Killing Starts* (Scribners and Collins, 1989), Reid and Freda are separated by a job Freda has at a location in rural Canada. When a

wealthy woman asks him to find her son, who has run away with some soldiers of fortune, Reid takes some vacation time, leaving George in charge, to demonstrate his wilderness skills as well as what he learned in the war. *On the Inside* has Reid masquerading as a constable, newly hired by a police force in a small boom town in northern Ontario. OPP has asked him to investigate reports of police corruption in Elliot, so Reid takes Sam and his newly married Freda on a busman's honeymoon.

Wood's books are characterized by clearcut plots, lots of action and backwoods adventure, and the occasional scene of violent bodily harm. While not for the faint-hearted, they do provide a satisfying read to the fan of police and action novels. Unfortunately, the three earliest books in the series—*Dead in the Water*, *Murder on Ice*, and *Live Bait*—appear to be out of print, even in paperback, and are exceedingly hard to find outside of libraries. The remaining four, however, are readily available in their paperback forms for the reader who enjoys a rough-and-tumble police procedural set in an unusual background for the genre: small-town, rural Canada.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**N**othing is so uncountable as the grains of sand in the desert, unless maybe it's the often confusing twists, turns, and events in the New Mexico-set thriller **White Sands**.

The film, which stars Willem Dafoe, Mickey Rourke, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, starts off with promise, showing a mysterious dead body, gun in hand, lying by a desert ruin. Nearby is a suitcase full of cash. All that adds up to a cool half-million dollars and a lot of questions.

The hero of the story is a local sheriff named Ray Dolezal (Dafoe). He seems like a good guy, but we really don't find out much about him, other than he's got a wife and a son.

Gathering up clues such as a mustard yellow carpet strand on the corpse and a telephone number scrawled on a piece of fast-food wrapper swallowed by

the murdered man and retrieved by the affable coroner (M. Emmet Walsh), Ray gets the investigation going. With a name provided by the party on the other end of the phone number, the lawman adopts the identity presumed to be that of the dead man and goes into it headfirst.

Ray bids his wife farewell one morning and tells her he might not be home that night. Neither shows much concern that he's going to a meeting with possible killers and has no backup and no idea what he's getting into.

He gets into plenty. Waiting in his motel room, he is surprised by a pair of gun-toting, knife-wielding women who search him for a wire, rough him up, and give him the time and place of his next meeting. They also leave with his suitcase full of cash.

If that weren't enough for

poor Ray, he then gets kidnapped by what turns out to be a gang of FBI agents. These guys take him to their office where they fill him in on who the corpse was (an agent gone bad), tell him that the money he just lost was FBI property, and gently let him know he owes them a half million dollars. And that's not easy to repay on his salary.

Facing this dilemma, Ray decides to do the only thing he can, he will go forward with the investigation, hoping to trap the killers and recover the loot.

With his new identity, Ray meets Gorman Lennox (Rourke), an art connoisseur and renegade arms dealer. Fortunately, Lennox doesn't seem to know that Ray isn't who he's pretending to be. But Lennox is quite a character, one with a hair-trigger edge, and our hero appears in some danger.

In this case, danger quickly takes the form of Lane Bodine (Mastrantonio), a beautiful woman with lots of money who's always looking for a good cause. Miss Bodine, as Lennox tells it, has met Ray's alter-ego before; his cover is about to be blown. But for some reason, she doesn't let on to Lennox that Ray is someone else.

The two even fall into some kind of will-they-or-won't-they relationship, although it

doesn't really make much sense.

The deal that Ray finds himself involved with is an arms deal, with the FBI's half million and Lennox's equal part buying U.S. Army weapons on the black market for resale at a profit to some unnamed rebel force.

Meanwhile, Ray finds himself being tailed by another pair of federal agents who have a different agenda from the ones who originally kidnapped, er, contacted him.

As for who's on what side, Lennox answers that with a cryptic, "This isn't about sides, it's about confusion."

Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio is a screenful, but her role as a cause looking for a rebel is superficial.

Willem Dafoe seems an all-American type as the small-town sheriff trying to do the right thing; he gives a credible performance. M. Emmet Walsh, as the town coroner, gives the film some much needed humor.

The larger mystery surrounding *White Sands* is why director Roger Donaldson, who did so well with *No Way Out*, was unable to sharpen up the story and add a little suspense.

Scenic New Mexico is pretty to look at, but it's not enough to save this film.



# THE STORY THAT WON



The April Mysterious Photo-B. Hall of Chillicothe, Ohio. Andy Dequasie of Pownal, Aylmer, Quebec, Canada; Maryland; Art Cosing of G. Dagle of Redford, Michigan, New York; Tracy Kelley of Sterling Heights, Michigan; Richard G. Tanner of Kingsport, Tennessee; Pamela M. Small of Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan; Faith Langstaff of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; and Barbara Fay Mitchell of Binghamton, New York.

graph contest was won by D. Honorable mentions go to Vermont; J. A. Brennan of Rod O'Neil of Bethesda, Fairfax, Virginia; Brendan gan; Ron Serakas of Glen Cove, New York; Tracy Kelley of Sterling Heights, Michigan; Richard G. Tanner of Kingsport, Tennessee; Pamela M. Small of Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan; Faith Langstaff of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; and Barbara Fay Mitchell of Binghamton, New York.

Henri Silberman, N.Y.C.

## WILD WILD WEST by D. B. Hall

The tall robber with the broken teeth smiled at his young accomplice. " 'Twas as easy as I said, wasn't it?"

Sweat ran down the boy's face, cutting through a layer of dust like a swift-running stream. "Easy?" queried the boy. "It was only easy 'cause I did all the work." He turned his head away and spit into the dust. "As usual," he muttered.

"Oh, you'll be justly rewarded," cackled the old man. "The headstones of Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and the entire Clanton gang will bring a pretty penny on the black market." Soundlessly he pulled a heavy Colt revolver from his holster and pointed it at the back of the boy's head. "And I do appreciate you loadin' them into my wagon."

"Old man." The voice was low, but commanding.

The robber spun around with a gasp. Standing ten yards away was Wyatt Earp, hands on his twin pistols.

"B-But y-you're dead," stammered the old man as he tried to raise his gun to shoot.

"Yes, and now so are you." Earp's hands flashed, and the report of his guns was loud in the early morning air.

The boy stood alone over the old man's body wondering what it was he had witnessed. With a grunt he carried the first stone back to its rightful place. That night he would catch a train headed east. His mother had been right. The West was just too wild.

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